



Prisoner without a Crime:

Disciplining Dissent in Ahidjo's Cameroon

Albert Mukong

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**To all those on the other side of the political
coin in totalitarian states**

Chapter One

It was about five o'clock in the morning when they came to take me away. It was a Tuesday, 6 October 1970. I remember the date very clearly because just a week earlier two people I loved had departed from this world. First, my long-time friend, Victor Elango, died on the day he was supposed to leave Cameroon for Britain for an in-service course on railway management. Then, the very day we were burying Victor in Kumba was the day Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser passed away from this world. Neither of these deaths had given us forewarning with moments of anxiety in sickness. Death came suddenly and carried off its prey quickly.

Yes, this was one form of death and it befell people who were dear to my heart. Nasser had become a near-idol to me since the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. I remember I was teaching then at Oriwu College, Ikorodu, near Lagos in Nigeria. I was one of Nasser's Youth who was ready to enlist as a volunteer to go and give a helping hand there in Egypt. I was just approaching twenty-three then and this fired the blood of nationalism in me. Yes, it was the Suez Canal crisis that awakened my soul to the injustices of colonialism and made me resolve to get involved in that struggle.

Events that change our lives sometimes appear trifling to others. And who says there is no divine hand that marks the course our lives must take? Just at this time too I read *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta* and then *Facing Mount Kenya* by Kenyatta himself. Now if there is no divine hand that marks the course our lives must follow, then why was it only at this time that I read these books which fired my blood with the determination to resist and fight against all oppression?

All this happened long before these six years began but I am narrating these events here because they determined the course my life was to take and so brought me to those most gruesome six years of my life. Three years earlier I had wanted to study Engineering at Seattle University in the United States but I could not get a scholarship. In 1955 I won admission to Glasgow University but again I could not get a scholarship. That very 1956 I got an Indian scholarship to do Engineering at Calcutta University, but I had to pay my own way to India. I remember that incident very well because again it revealed the weaknesses in colonial rule. I applied for assistance from the Southern Cameroon Government to meet the cost of my transport, but the Scholarship Board refused me. I remember falling out openly with the Scholarship Board. The same person who was then the chairman of the Southern Cameroon Scholarship Board was also on the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) board that had refused me a scholarship to the USA. He told me then that I was not fully qualified to do university study and that's why I could only obtain admission in India or in the USA. It did not change his position when I presented my admission to Glasgow University and then expressed the hope that the Board might then sponsor my engineering course there. However, the chairman's daughter who was at this same session of scholarship interviews got a scholarship to train as a nurse in Britain.

All these events and more decided my life and placed my name on the roll of freedom fighters. If I had gone off in those years to Britain, the United States of America or India, surely my life would have taken a different pattern. The years 1957 to 1961 were years of great importance in Cameroon history, and this is when I was offered the chance of a university education in Ibadan, Nigeria. My proximity to home ensured my complete involvement in the national struggle. This brought me to those six years I now set out to describe.

Perhaps a bit of introduction of myself will not be out of place here. After all, the story is about myself and since fundamental issues of the state of Cameroon and its personalities will be mentioned, it will be necessary to show my involvement so as to give a more balanced picture.

I was born in Babanki Tungo on 23 October 1933. I was educated at St Patrick's School, Babanki Tungo, and St Anthony's School, Njini-kom, all in the North-West Province. I attended St Joseph's College, Sasse, Buea, from 1948 to 1952 where I obtained my Senior Cambridge Certificate. After a year in the CDC Head Office (Accounts), Bota, I moved over to Nigeria where I taught in three secondary schools, Moiusi College, Ifebu-Igbo, Onwu College, Ikorodu, and Aggrey Memorial College, Aro-Chuku, before going to University College, Ibadan, in 1957.

I was registered in Ibadan for an honours physics course which I abandoned after failing the Part I examination in 1961. This drop in academic performance was no doubt occasioned by my heavy involvement in politics.

Before the 1959 elections when Mr John Ngu Foncha defeated Dr Endeley we had contented ourselves with helping with publications. Together with Mr Sankie Maimo (today of the State Inspectorate and Reforms) and Mr George Mbaraga (today living in voluntary exile in Europe), we published a quarterly magazine – *The Cameroon Voice*. We were sometimes assisted in this work by Mr Michael Sabum who has just retired from the Central Services of the National Assembly. He and Mr Mbaraga were members of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP), but Maimo and myself were non-party people.

We believed that Mr Foncha could successfully carry out the programme of Reunification. But unfortunately a month or so after Foncha won the elections and went to the United Nations, he dropped his talk of Independence and Unification and proposed a 'short period' of more colonial rule before independence. After independence the issue of Unification would be examined.

This truth has been suppressed but I know the majority of Anglophone Cameroonians will today acclaim Foncha for this stand and condemn us. Yes, but this is the truth and it was principally because of this stand of Foncha that I became heavily involved in Cameroon politics.

Professor Victor Anoma Ngu was then in London and was the first student to fly to New York to talk to Mr Foncha about this apparent change of position and the dangers in it. Fortunately before this United Nations session came up the Union Nationale des Étudiants Camerounais (UNEC) in France had sought and obtained from the International Union of Students (ISU) three tickets for Cameroon student delegates to this session. In France the ticket went to Jean-Marie Tchachet, whom I last saw in 1964 at Accra working in the Union des Populations du Cameroun (UPC) Secretariat. In Britain the ticket went to Fongum Gorji Dinka, today a prominent lawyer in Cameroon and the natural ruler of Widikum. In Nigeria the ticket came to me. I was rather reluctant to go until I received cables from Fon Dinka revealing this stand of Foncha. At this I got the earliest possible flight to New York to attend the UN session.

In the student body at Ibadan I was an assistant editor of *Iksan* (a political journal) and chairman of the Political Committee of the National Union of Kamerun Students. In this capacity I attended the Mamfe summit Conference in late August 1959, summoned by the British Government at the instance of the United Nations to decide on the questions to be put at the plebiscite. Thus I was very conversant with the political programme of the students which was adopted after studying the various political party programmes.

For Independence we favoured the UPC programme which wanted Unification before Independence. The point was that the French were noted for their intrigue and could not be trusted to pull out in a dignified way.

It was therefore proposed that the United Nations appoint a High Commissioner for Cameroon to take over from the two administering authorities. This could only be done after a plebiscite had established the willingness of the people to unite.

The UN High Commissioner would authorise free political activity, for a period of not less than six months but not more than one year, and after that conduct elections to a constituent assembly. Independence would then be handed over to the government formed by the leader of the majority party in the assembly.

It is a pity that both Britain and the USA opposed this programme in their blind war against communism. For indeed it was adopted by the majority of the Independent African States and if it had won, the prospects were that the Unified Cameroon would have adopted most of the British political institutions.

When the UPC was banned in 1955 in then French Cameroon, the leaders came over to the then Southern Cameroon and not only took refuge there but were able to organise their party. Many of the people from across the Mungo fleeing from the French tortures and harassment took refuge in the British side of the country and all admired the British respect of the rule of law in contradiction to the French banditry attacks on human liberty.

We knew it was dangerous to allow the French to grant their seeming independence to their stooges before the issue of unification was sorted out. And when things happened the way they did, we “were virtually absorbed into the independent Cameroon Republic. It was the fear of this situation that obliged me to become so heavily involved in the political life of the country.

In New York I failed to bring reason to bear on Dr Foncha as Professor Ngu had failed before me. At the United Nations we almost won a victory until the French had to summon the USA to join them in the anti-communist struggle against UPC communists in Cameroon.

When the UPC leaders were in the then Southern Cameroon I was in Nigeria and I never met any of them then. When they were banned in 1957 and thrown out of the country I was still in Nigeria. Mr Ntumazah from British Cameroon, who had become a member of the UPC and a close collaborator of Dr Felix Roland Moumie, the UPC President, founded the One Kamerun Movement In the British territory with the same policies as the UPC.

Mr Ndeh Ntumazah had met me at University College, Ibadan, while on a student visit. But I had never met Dr Moumie before. It was only at the United Nations that I met him for the first time.

On my return from the UN I was resolved to put in my bit to see what we could make of it before 1 January 1960 when French Cameroon was to become independent. I therefore formed the One Kamerun Students' wing and became its President. From now on I was often oscillating between Cameroon and Nigeria, Ghana and Nigeria as need arose. During the Christmas break in 1959 I visited Cameroon and after due consultation with Mr Ndeh Ntumazah, it was agreed that I should go to Ghana and try to persuade Dr Moumie and his friends to participate in the constitutional referendum of February 1960 in the Republic of Cameroon. I had also had consultations with the late Dr Eyidi Bebe whom I had also met at the UN.

It was in January 1960 that I effected this mission to Ghana and I met Dr Moumie together with Ernest Ouandie and Abel Kingue. It was my first time of meeting the last two. After the encouraging results of the referendum I accompanied the university sports team to Ghana in March 1960 to appeal again to these leaders to participate in the elections, but again they turned this down.

I participated in no small way in the campaigns for the plebiscite of 11 February 1961. These campaigns took me to all the present divisions of the North-West and South-West Provinces. In June 1961 after abandoning my university

studies I came home to full political life. In July that year at the Kumba One Kamerun Congress I was elected General Secretary of the Party and led the One Kamerun Delegation to the Foumban Constitutional Conference in August. This was after I had accompanied Mr Ndeh Ntumazah to the Bamenda constitutional talks summoned by the Foncha government.

In December 1961 I was the candidate opposing Dr Foncha in the elections to the then West Cameroon House of Assembly. I did not win. He became Prime Minister.

In January 1962 I got reports that there were plans to arrest us, the leaders of the One Kamerun Movement. By March, nine of us consequently escaped to Ghana to meet Mr Ndeh Ntumazah and a few of my OK colleagues who had preceded me.

While in exile in Ghana I worked on the *Evening News* - the party newspaper of Dr Nkrumah's Convention People Party. Not only did I fill in as a senior proof reader but I was charged with the ideology orientation work of the paper. To this objective I wrote several articles in a bid to appeal to the Ghanaian intellectual. My associates then included Mr Eric Human, Editor-in-Chief of the *Evening News*, Kofi Batsa, Editor-in-Chief of the SPAKK and a member of the Presidential Commission of three who acted for Nkrumah when he was on tour out of Ghana, Mr John Welbeek, Executive Secretary of the CPP, and many others. I also gave broadcasts in the programme 'Freedom Fighters'. In this way I earned my living fairly well.

The open attempts on Dr Nkrumah's life which started in 1962 at Nkulungu Ngu, created a very confused situation for us Cameroonians there and this finally resulted in my leaving Ghana for Togo in 1964. I went to Togo on the ticket of the then Togolese Vice President Meachi. There I took up a teaching job at the Lycee Bonccare until November when I returned to Cameroon quite unprepared.

I had become very well known to Mr Ahman Dicko, the Cameroon Ambassador in Nigeria, since my student days. He was very much impressed by the memorandum we, the students, had prepared for the United Nations' visiting team and the one after the plebiscite, a copy of which we sent to the Cameroon Government through him. We were indeed on good terms and so, while in Ghana and Togo, each time I visited Nigeria I paid a courtesy call on him.

He was not happy that I was not in Cameroon and he knew I had a Nigerian passport, so he protested to the Nigerian Government. The next time I came to Nigeria the passport was seized and when I went to the Cameroon Ambassador for a travel document back to Togo he refused, telling me he thought and believed I ought to be in Cameroon. He assured me there would be no reprisals. After a few weeks sticking around Lagos I decided to come back home and face the consequences. My conscience was clear. To be fair to Ahman Dicko, he protested to Ahidjo very energetically when I was detained on my return. This surely aided my early release then.

That morning of 6 October 1970, they surrounded my mat house residence in Kumba Town while all honest citizens were still sleeping. They were the men of the torture squad of Ahidjo's regime. They have adopted other names so as to hide their true identity but all Cameroonians know them as the BMM. Today they try to go round under the name of *Brigade de Recherche*, but we know that their field of research is into the latest methods of torture and how best they can make it penetrating and lingering. They have no other methods of getting at what they want but torture.

Our immediate ancestors were not so vicious and brutal. Indeed they cultivated to a much higher degree the development of the inner man. The life of the truly traditional man, the one still faithful to ancient traditions, not yet corrupted by Western influences, not yet polluted by the brand of Christianity that the West brought to us, is

surely much higher, revealing greater love and respect for his fellow man and reminiscent of man's affinity with his creator, God. What we have received as Christianity is very far from what Christ himself taught and surely Jesus is much scandalised and agonised by what his Western standard-bearers are hawking round the world. No doubt he has had to re-appear himself, taking on this dark colour, in the midst of the world so as to re-teach what he had taught, and so the world must look to this new and only genuine brand of Christianity that Africa is now exporting to the Americas, Europe, Asia and throughout the entire world.

Once again it will be necessary to put issues here in perspective, for we have skipped a full ten years since independence before my arrest.

President Ahmadou Ahidjo in 1961 had become leader of the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The UPC, which did not participate in the elections and saw the new state as the clearest example of neo-colonialism with Ahidjo as a puppet, continued an armed struggle in the country. Let us look at how this came about.

The struggle in French colonies was between the nationalist forces and France or its representatives. In order to promote its assimilation policy France found puppets in its various colonies who were happy to be called French citizens and used to promote the programme of assimilation. The nationalist leaders in the various French colonies rallied round and organised the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA). It had for its President Houphouët-Boigny, today President of the Ivory Coast, and Ruben Um Nyobe, Secretary General of the UPC, as its first Vice President.

Ahidjo had been nominated in the early fifties to represent Cameroon in the Consultative Assembly in France and there he was found to be a very willing tool in the hands of France.

In 1956 a new constitution was granted the French colonies – under the famous Loi Cadre. As this spelt assimilation pure and simple, it met with great resistance

from the RDA. Following this power, the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of Cameroon was elected in 1957 and Mr Andre-Marie Mbida formed its first government.

Ahmadou Ahidjo who appeared to be the leader of the Northern Group, the biggest in the Assembly, was appointed Minister of the Interior and Vice Premier to Mbida.

The UPC forces were still very strong and its slogans of Immediate Independence and Reunification were now being embraced by nearly all other Cameroonian political movements including *Le Mouvement*.

Mbida dismissed the idea of Cameroon Independence, saying it needed ten more years before such an issue could be examined. As for Cameroon Reunification he did not express any enthusiasm for it. Ahidjo served in this government until February, 1958.

Ahidjo and his party had no clear ideas about the concept of Unification and Independence. This was very clear from the fact that the party's Secretary General, Moussa Yaya, even as late as 1959 could not present the Union Camerounaise (UC) programme for Independence, when asked in March 1959 by the President of the Trusteeship Committee of the United Nations. I remember this question being put to Moussa Yaya at the request of Dr Petchachi of Iraq and no answer was got. Yet it was quite direct: 'Mr Moussa Yaya, what is the programme of the UC for Cameroon Independence?' His reply was 'The UC is the majority party in the assembly and its programme is Unification and Independence.'

The question was repeated five times and it received this same answer. Unfortunately for Moussa Yaya, he was sitting in the petitioners' bench and could not easily receive the advice of the French delegation to the UN. I was an eye-witness of this scene and a petitioner along with Action Nationals of Soppo Priso who was then the President of the Assembly.

I bade my wife farewell at the BMM as I was taken off to the railway station bound for Douala and Yaounde. A young gendarme officer was detailed to conduct me to Yaounde. I do not know if he received special instructions or not about me but I must note here that he was very civil and respectful in his conduct, maybe because he was Anglophone and also from Bamenda. He comported himself rather more as a bodyguard than a police escort for a detainee. We got to Yaounde the next morning and he took me to the head office of the BMM. It had just changed its name then from SEDOC (*Service des Études et de Documentations*) to DIREDOC (*Direction des Études et de Documentation*). Anyway it is better known even to this day by the name its French authors gave it, i.e. SEDOC. Today it has again changed its name to *Service des Études et des Recherches*. But to the average Cameroonian it remains BMM.

At the DIREDOC offices the young gendarme officer was asked to deposit me at the Yaounde BMM. At this point the young man became scandalised and pitied me a lot, for that was where Bishop Ndongmo and his group as well as Mr Ernest Ouandie and his group were being held. It was common knowledge that they were being subjected to the most modern torture methods invented for extracting the desired declarations from the accused.

In those days the very approaches of the Yaounde BMM were horribly awesome. As soon as you passed the Kondongui Central Prisons a sort of awe and fear evoking dejected despondency descended on you and you had not yet had a glimpse of the inside of the place. The metal gates opened with a clanking noise and immediately revealed soldiers armed with sub-machine guns and grenades all over the premises. I arrived after mid-day when the Commissaire and his office staff were on lunch break. I was taken to the *Chef de Poste* – a police brigadier. He received me and discharged the Kumba gendarme. He took my name and entered my particulars in the register, then he ran down the

list of the cells. The least populated was cell 2 with eighteen inmates. Bishop Ndongmo had to remain alone in cell 1. The other cells had from 22 to 26 inmates and so he decided that I should join the inmates of cell 2.

It was at about two o'clock in the afternoon of 7 October 1970 that I was thrown into cell 2 of the Yaounde BMM. The room was about 5? metres square and in this space there was a water system toilet. It was unventilated and an electric light blazed day and night. There was hardly any space in this cell to receive another prisoner for Mr Ouandie, who was being given VIP treatment, had been provided with a small Vono bed. This took up more space than necessary to accommodate one man. Anyway, the cell had to contain me and contain me it did. I had to squeeze myself in between two other prisoners. We had to lie on our sides to fit.

Chapter Two

My little kit had been held back by the Chef de Poste but he allowed me to take my loin-cloth into the cell. As I settled down on the little space that had been made for me between two inmates I quickly surveyed my cell companions. I had met Ernest Ouandie in Accra on one or two occasions but that was all the physical contact that existed between us and I do not easily recognise faces. He too did not immediately recognise me but because of my knowledge that he was there in the BMM I guessed right that he was the one. Indeed his nine years in the bush had transformed him almost completely.

I had hardly settled down when the chief of the cell called me to his side. I still remember his face and name. He was one Joseph Bisoe. He had just returned from his adventures in Brazzaville when he was picked up, suspected of being one of the UPC men in Congo Brazzaville. Bisoe and those around him, indeed the whole cell, wanted to know my name and why I had been brought in. Of course Ernest Ouandie on his bed was also very keen to know. Perhaps I was one of his many agents operating in different sections of the country. I told them I was from 'Cameroun Occidental' (West Cameroon). I was an electrical inspector working for Powercam at Kumba. I had just been picked up the day before and put en route for Yaounde. Here I was and I had not the foggiest idea why I had been brought there.

My cell inmates all laughed at my story and told me that I had no need to hide the facts from them because they would soon be known to all the inmates of the BMM. According to them, the truth would be extracted from me

that very afternoon in a manner that was far from being pleasant. They advised me to confess everything and save myself from torture. I admitted that if I was asked something I knew of, I would tell them, but I could not confess things about which I was ignorant. Mr Bisoe asked me whether I had not dabbled in politics. There and then I told him I had never hidden the fact that I was one of the politicians who brought about the unification of the two Cameroons. I was indeed the Secretary General of the One Kamerun Movement whose members were being harassed in the country and because of which some of my colleagues had taken refuge outside Cameroon. Indeed I had gone into voluntary exile but after sometime decided to come back home and continue the struggle in a legal way.

At this juncture Mr Ouandie burst in and said, *‘C’est vous, Camarade Mukong? Vraiment mon cœur battait de façon de me suggérer quelque chose quand on vous a introduit dans cette cellule’* (It’s you, Comrade Mukong? Truly my heart was beating in a way as to suggest something to me when you were introduced into this cell).

I had disagreed with Mr Ouandie and his colleagues Dr Moumie and Mr Abel Kingue in 1960 at Accra on the continuation of the armed struggle. I told them it had been misguided and therefore needed a new approach. I strongly urged them to participate in the elections of 1960. Dr Moumie almost agreed with me but his other two colleagues over-ruled him. Well, I was not a UPC-ist but as a leading member of the One Kamerun Movement, a fraternal party with the Union des Populations du Cameroun, I was in good standing in leading UPC circles. I remember that at that time Mr Isaac Tchournba, who is today still living in New Deido, Douala, was lying sick at the African Affairs Centre in Ghana. He was happy with my stand and wished strongly that I could bring reason to bear on his party leaders – unfortunately all of them are dead today.

It appears that this discussion had flashed back to Ouandie's mind. He asked me whether in fact I had been all the while in Cameroon. I admitted it and he wanted to know how I had fared. I told him I could not count much success but now and again one was able to influence a certain decision, now and again one was able to help a young party comrade get a job or a scholarship. When one took a strong stand on a political issue and lost, one earned some weeks or months in the BMM. That's how it had been with me and that's why I had found myself here in the BMM.

Indeed when I had advocated working within the legal set-up and employing constitutional means in the continuation of the struggle, Ouandie and Kingue looked upon me as a sell-out and so counted me out until we met here in the cell. By then both Dr Moumie and Mr Kingue had died. Really Ouandie had come into the country about July 1961 and I went into voluntary exile in March 1962.

I returned to the country in November 1964 and after some six weeks detention I was released. I had exercised different functions and had only one other brief stay of five weeks in the BMM before this.

Surely I need not regard as important arrests and detentions which lasted less than seventy-two hours. It surprised Ouandie that that was the type of collaboration I had had with the regime. He told me frankly that he had lost track of me and believed I must be out of the country or dead.

Ernest Ouandie, as already stated, was provided with a small Vono bed and mattress and was dressed in black trousers and shirt. Age told on him, for he was grey all over, but it was due more to his living conditions in the nationalist bush struggle or *maquis* for nearly nine years. The rest of the cell inmates had to lie on the floor with only their clothing to separate skin from cement. The overcrowding in the cell made it too hot in the day and just tolerable at night. The

other cell-mates were from various walks of life – farmers, fortune tellers, traders and middle-class functionaries. Two or three had been there for over a year but the majority had been brought in only after the arrest of Ernest Ouandie. I had come in during the midday break when there was relative calm in the place. When work resumed with its various methods, the horror of the place was then revealed. I was warned to get ready to be questioned at 2.30 p.m. for work was brisk and swift those days. My cell mates warned me to try to satisfy the people who questioned me and tell them all the truth. Of course I was ready to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. There again Bisoe warned me not to be dull. The truth in the BMM is not what happened but what the commissaire or the man investigating the case will want you to declare. What he wants you to declare is the truth which you must tell willy nilly. I told him there and then that nothing on earth would induce me to accept fabrications particularly if they hurt another person.

I had just dozed off a bit when I heard the distant ring of an electric bell. The man next to me shook me: *Voilà le Commissaire est déjà là apprêtez-vous, car sûrement vous serez entendu cet après-midi* (Behold, the commissaire is already there, get ready, for you will surely be called this afternoon). I shrugged my shoulders and told him it was all the same to me. Although I tried to keep up this nonchalant attitude I must confess that the terror that seemed to have seized the place right from the ringing of that bell was awful. It was not only felt but could almost be seen. And this gripped everyone. Only those who had gone through the ordeal and signed their declarations knew that they were now saved further tortures, unless a newcomer mentioned their name.

Soon I saw the Chef de Poste pass to the Commissaire's office. On return he collected a bunch of keys and I could hear him opening the door of cell three. There and then Mr Bisoe told me to get ready, he ordered those who had rushed to the door to give way to me so that when the police come

for me there should be no delay. It is funny, these scenes of horror and torture were a daily occurrence in the BMM yet detainees always behaved as though it was something new; rushing to the door of the cell to see who was being led to the slaughter. I got up and took my place at the door for I was also anxious to be called. I wanted to know why I had been picked up and why I found myself where I was. I was convinced there was an error somewhere and the sooner the error was cleared the better. But then again an inner voice advised me to resign myself for the matter would last long.

That afternoon our cell was never even opened and no one seemed to have taken note that I had come in. This surprised my inmates but they concluded that I would be first on the list in the morning. Yes, after having learnt a bit of my past they said, *'Qui, vous êtes un gros poisson, vous aurez beaucoup à dire'*. (Yes, you are a big catch and you will have a lot to say). That night Ouandie assured me that he never had occasion to mention my name in his declarations and so I should not suspect him of being the origin of my arrest. Indeed I never suspected him for our earlier contacts had only been as I have already narrated. The only UPC leader with whom I had had a bit more to do was Dr Felix Roland Moumie who had died on 3 November 1960.

When I had spent over forty-eight hours in the cell and the investigators showed no signs of having known that I was there my cell inmates were surprised. They termed me *'vaunen'*, 'good for nothing', *'un énergumène'*. A week went by and still no one had called me up. This confounded me and those with whom I was in the cell. In the past the BMM chaps would round up useless cases and keep the people in the BMM perhaps to force them to bribe their way back to liberty or just to let terror reign in the society. But this was a time when very serious work was going on in the BMM. Why was it necessary to bring in a case like mine?

One morning, I think it was around 10 a.m., they came and opened my cell and called me out. I thought it was time for my own investigation to start. There in the office I saw the Commissaire for the first time. He was with an old renegade party man of mine who had become a police agent after having gone through the BMM trials. He was working in the DIREDOC, the head office of the BMM. He told me he never knew I was there until the lawyer Gorji Dinka came asking him of my whereabouts and then informed him I was there in the BMM. He had come with the lawyer who was not allowed to enter the building. Then he gave me some money and a packet of cigarettes. I thanked God for the visit as it brought me supplies. I tried to find out from the Commissaire why I was there but he told me he knew nothing about my arrest. In this state I was left to pine away in the cell for three months until the Ouandie-Ndongmo cases had been disposed of and Ouandie had even been executed before I was called up for questioning in which only facts of my *curriculum vitae* were wanted.

After that I waited in the BMM for another three months before the decision to send me to the Mantoum Concentration Camp – *Centre d'Education Civique de Mantoum* – was communicated to me. A few days later, at about 3 a.m., 23 of us who thus had been assigned to Mantoum were called out and packed into a truck and so we took leave of this place of terror and horror.

But we cannot so easily skip over those days in the BMM, for they are the most revealing, and many things about which people only conjecture we really lived through in those days.

That first afternoon of 7 October 1970, the Chef de Poste opened cell three and sent out someone, then he went round the other cells and sent other candidates to the office of the Commissaire. Soon the questioning started. Even in our cells we knew it had started for it was signalled by the sharp noise of the cane falling with force on the human skin and then the victim shrieking in reaction. There were

about three people being questioned at a time that afternoon, and each victim was thus periodically subjected to these strokes of the cane. The noise of the falling cane built up the crescendo of fear that reigned in the place. This went on that evening till 8 p.m. As they finished with one candidate he was taken back to his cell and another fetched to undergo the ordeal.

In general any new candidate was first taken to the Commissaire who after interviewing him sent him over to one of the investigators. It is this investigator, or *enquêteur* as they are known in French, who puts you through the various processes of torture. If you are soft the terror that reigns in the place is enough to make you accept everything and the few strokes that you receive are only to help you complete your story when you tell it to strangers of the place. The Commissaire may seem civil as he receives you. This is only to help him in the exercise he is carrying out because he is examining you cosmically. If you are not sharp you may not notice as he is looking into the bowl before him or squeezing one of his fetish bags. But you must notice the occasional rings of the bell for you think he is summoning someone from outside and no one turns up. You will not fail to notice the strong smell of the perfume on him and he occasionally takes out the small bottle to spray himself or the table complaining that you have brought in the odious smell of the cell.

If he notices that you have a particularly strong character you may then find him shouting at you only to cow you down. If these threats do not have the desired reaction, he gets spirits to work on you and if these spirits cannot dare approach you he has some devices with which he squeezes your fingers. Whether you can resist pain or not, it is in your own interest to show weakness of the flesh and shriek as loud as possible. This amuses him and in this satisfaction he may stop.

The purposes of torture are manifold. First, to take away your ego and pride, reveal to you your helplessness and absolute dependence on them, get some fun from the various reactions and contortions different people make as a show of pain, bring you to your knees so that you may pray to them as you pray to God, reduce the victim into a complete parrot who says yes when told to do so and no similarly.

When the Commissaire has finished with you he then assigns you to one of the '*enquêteurs*' Their methods are definitely rough and rude. They shout at you and you think they are annoyed but it is mainly to intimidate you. Of course they have become so used to getting people on their knees praying to them as though they were gods that they have conic to believe they are gods and quickly get angry if you come before them behaving as though you were dealing with ordinary humans.

Some *enquêteurs* start off with you by administering some blows to you and watching your reaction. You dare not show any anger or make him suspect you could react violently against him, for I have never met worse cowards. He calls in the *gorille* (a soldier in attendance assigned to execute torture), and hands you over to him for breaking. This may consist only in inflicting hard strokes on you on soft and sensitive spots. If this breaks you so much the better for you. If it fails you are taken to the torture theatre or, as we may call it, the factory for producing desired declarations.

The torture room is a special place in the BMM and no detainee likes to be conducted there. Indeed, it is no use allowing yourself to be taken there for you will have to make the desired declarations. Very few people, and indeed I mean hardly one person in a thousand, that go in to this room ever succeed in coming out without agreeing to sign the declaration they had been originally asked to adopt as theirs. I have seen only a few such cases; I think I can remember only three. Two of these, who resisted to the end of the tortures, died within two months of undergoing

the process. They were only carried out of that room, and do not think the BMM authorities showed any remorse. Indeed they grew more vexed as if to say, you have cheated us of our fun, you have insulted our pride.

The third case was one they had to give up fast and indeed this man was released that very day. He exhibited a phenomenon very strange to them. Even Muyakana, the Commissaire who had been at this job as far back as the late fifties as a trainee in French hands, could only think of two or three other such cases before.

After this prisoner had been given over forty strokes of the cane he showed no signs of pain and his body showed no lacerations. He was then put on the '*balançoire*' – a swing where he "was rocked with the cane falling at regular intervals. Still the young man showed no sign of pain. Then it was decided to use the electric current on him. The apparatus was brought, wound and the terminals were connected to his rectum. As soon as the current was switched on the apparatus went wrong and could not function again. Another apparatus was brought and this time it was decided that his genital organs be the point of application of the terminals. It suffered the same fate as the first.

This chap was left suspended on the *balançoire* at noon and Socked up alone in that room.

That afternoon they came back from break a bit earlier for they were hoping to come and find a corpse in that room where God does not exist. (Ah yes, I forgot to inform the reader that on the door of this room it is written '*il n'y a pas de Dieu ici*' (There is no God here). By this you understand it is useless appealing to them for mercy in God's name.) Yet the young man on the *balançoire* looked quite normal and unruffled when his torturers came back at 2.15 p.m. In panic they quickly loosened him and brought him down from the *balançoire*. To their further surprise he stood firmly on his legs and talked normally to them. Panic and awe seized them and he was sent to the Chef de Poste to collect his belongings and leave the place at once.

We have just been talking of this *balançoire* as though it is something you come across in normal life. It is a special torture device designed by the French in Algeria. It consists of two tripods of wood about 90 cm high. The tripods have holes in them into which fit the ends of a metal bar. The tripods are placed at a distance apart equal to the length of the metal bar. The victim is made to sit on the floor on his buttocks. His two legs are bent upwards and made to grip the metal bar against the thighs. The legs and hands are then tied up ensuring a firm grip on the bar.

The victim is then lifted and suspended from the bar on the two tripods. In this condition circulation is very difficult at the points where the victim is tied to the bar. In the suspended position you are pushed so that you execute swinging movements around the metal bar. At the point where your buttocks are raised most, the operating *gorilla* lands a solid stroke on you. An average man in good health cannot stand up to thirty minutes on this instrument and if you keep up to that thirty minutes on it you may be maimed for life. Most victims break down at this stage and after having remained suspended there for five minutes beg to be put down ready to sign their death warrants.

If you can resist this beyond ten minutes then the *courant* method is added. You may just be suspended on the *balançoire*. This is sufficiently excruciating to break down a highly stubborn will. You may be suspended and rocked on the *balançoire* which is still worse as the bar grinds into the flesh around the elbows and the knees. The rocking may be accompanied by strokes of the cane. Then finally the last addition is electric current which is applied to delicate parts of your body while you are suspended on this *balançoire*. The parts preferred arc around the eyes, the genital organs, the armpits, the rectum, etc. Men or women all undergo these processes. These are the most dreaded methods of physical torture in the BMM.

It is indeed useless to take on these tortures except for moral reasons if you were being asked to lie against another. But if they wanted you to sign false statements against yourself that supported their case, it would be better to sign them if you found out that they were determined to make you sign them. Half an hour or so on the *balançoire* maims you for life much worse than a few years in the detention camp. And when they are resolved, you will and must end up in the detention camp; whether you sign or not. What then is the good in first resisting and receiving all these tortures? I never underwent any of these processes myself in the BMM, for they knew me as an opponent of the regime and I never hid my opposition. Sometimes I even made declarations to them against Ahmadou Ahidjo which shocked and scandalised them. Perhaps they were happy to meet a rare sample once in a while that spoke the truth which no one dared to speak. For that they respected me and spared me those torture processes; except that having been in the BMM you had to receive a few strokes of the cane. And it was useless with me as they found out. I did not writhe and shout like the others. This caining in the BMM was not serious but it was in Tchollire concentration camp that I was twice subjected to real beatings that resulted in my taking to my bed for three days thereafter.

I had visited the first Yaounde BMM, the one which the French authors of the institution were using, in 1964, when I returned from my voluntary exile and was kept in the old stinking cells of the *Police Judiciaire*. There they did their investigations, or rather I prefer to use the French word *enquête* because when investigations are talked of one conceives some attempt to uncover a crime. That's not the purpose here. They are looking for facts to justify the action they have resolved to take. That is why torture is used to make you admit whatever crimes you are supposed to have committed. Yes, after the *enquête* at the Police Judiciaire they found enough grounds to send me to the Mantoum

Concentration Camp. I was then transferred to the BMM to await the next occasion when similar victims would be moved there. I put in nearly a week there and events turned otherwise. Political intervention resulted in my release on 2 January 1965.

I was referring to this BMM because I wanted to compare certain aspects of it with the 1970 BMM which had been modernised even in the construction. From the exterior the old building looked very innocent and was right on a street in town. It was about 50 metres from the old Police Judiciaire building and stood on an elevated piece of ground so that you ascended a flight of about twelve steps to get to it. Here you entered into a small room and passed into a little corridor and then moved into where the prisoners were dumped. These rooms were particularly small and the torture room was just near the space in which the prisoners were kept. Next to them were two other rooms, one used by the Commissaire and the other one was where the famous *enquêteurs* stayed.

From where the prisoners were kept a flight of stairs ran down to some underground chambers. As the space above was too small to contain all the prisoners in those days, many of them passed their time in this flight of steps and even slept on the floor underground. Here were also special rooms which were left dark. The rest of the BMM was lighted day and night by electricity for the arrangements did not permit the entry of natural light. The underground dark cells were cells of liquidation. In all my life I have never met anyone who came out of those cells but even when I was there, there were some victims in those cells. In general, when you were assigned to one of those cells, it meant you were already condemned to death.

Time and again a victim in one of those cells was fetched out to testify against a new entrant. If the newcomer was considered more dangerous or more powerful politically and

could not be silently eliminated, the victim in the underground was promised life if he could testify against the more formidable enemy. If he accepted he testified and was taken to the military tribunal where if he made the same declarations and thus obtained an execution for the more formidable enemy of the government, he was released thereafter with the strict warning never to relate the process through which he had passed – particularly what happened in those underground cells. That is why it is difficult to get a true description of those chambers. But sometimes those who gain their liberty confide in a friend who confides in another and so the story goes on.

The terror in the place was such that I could not hazard to go down those steps for I was numbered among the prisoners that were to stay on that floor only.

There was something the BMM authorities could not understand about my case – firstly they did not carry out their investigations on me, and secondly they were surprised that a minister fed me from his own house twice every day. Yes, in those days the English-speaking ministers were not yet fully integrated into the Ahidjo, set-up and so my one-time very intimate friend, university colleague and party friend Nzo Ekaah Ngaky took responsibility for feeding me till I was released. Nzo was then Minister of Health. Dr Bernard Fonlon, who was Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, had his own way which seriously embarrassed the authorities of the Police Judiciaire. On Sundays he would bring food to me himself and sit there chatting with me for an hour or more. Often he came with Dr Lantum Daniel of CUSS. And as though this was not enough to shake up these pillars of the regime, the security men, Mr Emmanuel Egbe, then Deputy Minister of Justice, ordered them to bring me to his office and when I came we spent over an hour chatting and discussing the conditions of my detention while the officer who brought me sat there listening.

Yes, in those days the fear of the uncertain, and the lust for office, had not so completely seized the Anglophone Ministers and politicians. I remember my brother was then a deputy in the National Assembly; he came and visited me and thereafter contacted Mr John Ngu Foncha who was then Ahidjo's deputy. These things served as a sort of warning to my prison authorities for they did not know what my actual fate would be. Yes, papers had been signed by the Minister of Territorial Administration consigning me to the Mantoum Concentration Camp. But they knew anything could happen at any time. They had seen people recalled even from the concentration camps and given highly responsible positions in government.

And so I was given the best conditions the BMM could afford. But they knew I was a leader of the One Kamerun Movement and most of my colleagues in the BMM then were members of the UPC which enjoyed fraternal relations with the One Kamerun. They also suspected I would be inquisitive and they could not guarantee their ability to keep me silent if I learnt all that went on there, and so a close watch was kept to prohibit any communication between the other prisoners and myself. But how far could they succeed in segregating us who lived in the same space twenty-four hours a day?

Anyway, it is not the story of those days we are talking of here. It shall be fully told in its own context. It has come up just by the way and because I wanted to make this comparison. I am doing so because I want to inform the world about the origin of the General notion that Cameroon keeps its political detainees underground. This is the only underground prison I know of and I have been to the Mantoum, and Tchollire detention camps. The similarity with the underground also arises from the dark cells which these centres maintain for punishing those who cannot be easily brainwashed. There you may be locked up for as long

as six months. This is the cause of the fact that many people coming out from these prisons are blind. Even those who spend long periods in the present BMM at Yaounde also run the risk of blindness because the poor natural lighting conditions also necessitate that electric light is used twenty-four hours a day. When you have lived for a week in such conditions you can hardly accommodate natural light when you are allowed out for a sunbath. Another factor which contributes to the notion of underground prisons is that a person sent to the detention camps is virtually cut off from his family and friends. Normally when one is in the BMM there is just no possibility of communicating with the outside world. When you are moved to the concentration camps you may write to your family and friends for material and financial assistance. Your friends and family members may even visit you after making applications and obtaining the communication permits. Well, that is the theory but the reality is that it is very difficult to obtain the communication permits and the places where these camps are have no easy access. Thirdly if they write to you they also run the risk of being picked up as sympathisers of enemies of government.

My intention here is to compare the old BMM with the new. May I only add here that the information that I picked up in that old BMM revealed that in one of the underground cells, a certain arrangement obliged the victim to stand directly under a point from which water dripped on to his head and this went on till he passed away. These cells were liquidation cells, quite different from the torture chamber in-tended for those who had a chance of being released.

The new BMM is built in an L shape, the offices occupying the short arm of the L. The long arm consists of two rows of cells: five cells in front and five cells behind. The front and back rows are built separately. A wall encloses the whole place and just by the offices a small building houses the Chef de Poste and his staff of constabulary.

The whole arrangement shades off light from getting into the cells. Each cell is about 3 metres square and contains a toilet and a tap. Thus the inmates have no cause to want to be led out of it. There is a little yard between the Poste de Police and the cells. There is also an inner wall enclosing the Poste de Police and the rest of the cells. That is the situation we met in October 1970. Later, in the course of the years, indeed in 1972 when I was brought to Yaounde for medical attention I discovered that some addition had been made to these structures. Two rooms had been built outside the inner fence giving out on to the yard for visitors and the working staff. These rooms were special rooms where some of those long-stay inmates could receive their girl-friends and wives on special terms.

Chapter Three

It was in this place that I spent the first six months of those six years. As I already stated I came in when the cases of Ouandie and Ndongmo were going on. They were finally tried in December 1970 and judgement was delivered early in January; I think it was 5 January 1971 and if my memory is still good, Ouandie, Wambo le Courant and a third victim who fell alongside Ouandie were executed in Bafoussam on 15 January 1971. It was after this, I think around 20 January, that I was called up for routine questioning just to establish my *curriculum vitae*.

I have just been referring to the Ouandie case and the Bishop Ndongmo case as though all who will read this work knew these personalities. Ernest Ouandie was the second Vice President of the UPC – Union des Populations du Cameroun – the first really mass political party in Cameroun. As a result of violent clashes between the UPC militants and French colonial forces in Douala in 1955, the party was banned and the French colonial authorities began to pursue and arrest its members and of course the leaders. When these clashes took place Dr Felix Roland Moumie, the then President of the UPC, Mr Abel Kingue and Ernest Ouandie, first and second Vice Presidents of the party respectively, were found in Douala and the Mungo regions. They escaped from the French and took refuge in the then Southern Cameroons under British mandatory rule. The British had linked up its administration with its vast colony of Nigeria.

Ruben Um Nyobe, the then Secretary General of the UPC, was trapped by French forces in the Sanaga Maritime region. And the French forces organised a serious campaign to get at Um Nyobe. In these military campaigns rather ruthless treatment was meted out to known UPC members and supporters as well as to towns and villages that were sympathetic to UPC ideology. The UPC had advocated the Reunification and Independence of the two Cameroons as opposed to the French policy of assimilation and the creation of France Outre-Mer.

The UPC members thus harassed and pursued found it necessary to organise resistance groups to fight back against the French forces. They were thus compelled to take refuge in the thick and swampy forests, in caves and on hills of difficult countryside. And so was born the *maquis* and the organised rebellion in the national struggle led by the UPC. This became very bloody as the French were also ruthless in their methods. This struggle stretched through the years, suffered many setbacks and even degenerated into an organisation of banditry.

Ruben Um Nyobe was the life of the rebellion and he conducted it himself in the Sanaga Maritime Area. Unfortunately, when the Ahidjo regime came up in 1958 and talked of Independence and Unification, Ruben Um Nyobe – a nationalist and patriot of no mean order – took him seriously and so wanted to negotiate a cease-fire with him. But unfortunately for Um Nyobe and the nationalist struggle, Ahmadou Ahidjo used the opportunity to intrigue with the emissaries of Um Nyobe and obtained the needed betrayal through which he eliminated Um Nyobe. The French Forces assassinated Um Nyobe on 13 September 1958.

After this the armed struggle lost the only leadership that understood the struggle and was with the people. The leaders who fled over to the then Southern Cameroons tried to found the UPC there but in 1957 the Nigeria Government banned it and the leaders were deported. Colonel Nasser

received them in Egypt and some went to Khartoum. From outside they tried to keep up the struggle by sending supplies and propaganda material under very difficult conditions to the *maquis*. Their main link was the struggle in the Bamileke and Wouri regions. Nonetheless in the lifetime of Um they kept up some poor contact which also gave moral and tactical guidance to the Bamileke region.

Dr Moumie was done to death by *la Main Rouge* (the Red Hand) in 1960. He died of rat poisoning on 3 November 1960. In 1961 Abel Kingue and Ernest Ouandie decided that it was absolutely necessary for one of them to get into the *maquis*. Ernest Ouandie opted to go particularly because Abel Kingue had very poor health (Kingue died in Cairo in 1964). Ouandie returned to Cameroon in July or August 1961 and went straight into the *maquis*. There he remained to lead the resistance until his arrest or surrender in 1970. According to Ernest Ouandie he surrendered himself to the gendarmerie at Mbanga.

The resistance movement reached the peak of its power in 1959 when it controlled most of the Bamileke region. In 1960 it was still a force to be reckoned with but by 1961 it had fallen off seriously in its nationalist work. There are several reasons for this but this is not the place to deal with it. But we must admit that the *maquis* movement degenerated rapidly in the years 1963 to 1965 and became almost a purely banditry movement. Bamilekes of honour and conscience felt at this time that it was necessary to end this movement, and so took measures towards this end. Mayi Matip Theodore, Um Nyobe's right hand man, abandoned the *maquis* in March 1959, a few months after Urn's death. He was elected to the National Assembly and so ended the rebellion in the Sanaga Maritime region.

It was in this spirit that His Lordship Albert Ndongmo, Bishop of Nkongsamba, met Ahidjo and discussed with him the need for ending the uprising. He offered his own services to help bring Ernest Ouandie out of the bush and thus his

supporters on condition that the government would not touch their lives but would provide a rehabilitation scheme for them. This Ahidjo promised him and Mr Enoch Kwayeb, the then Minister of Territorial Administration, and Saoudou Daoudou, the then Minister of the Armed Forces, were all privy to this arrangement. Armed with this government undertaking, Ndongmo made contact with Ouandie and showed himself as a sympathiser. Ouandie was happy to get the assistance of such a personality as Bishop Ndongmo and quickly entered into an understanding with him. The Bishop did not immediately make his plans known to Ouandie. Of course he would have failed before he started. He offered his palace as a place of rest and Ouandie occasionally came out there.

Bishop Ndongmo was working things up to the stage where he could put the idea to Ouandie of giving up the struggle and coming to some understanding with government when he discovered that there was no sincerity on the part of the government. So he changed plans and agreed with Ouandie that he should leave the country and take refuge in Algeria.

He had gone far with the arrangements for getting a passport for Ouandie when the thing was leaked to the security and so the plan became impossible. Owing to the poor communication link between him and Ouandie he could not immediately cancel the plan on the agreed date of departure. Ouandie thus turned up for his departure to Algeria when the passport was not ready.

At the same time Bishop Ndongmo was called to Rome by the Pope and there was to be a retreat by the nuns in his palace. He was obliged therefore to move Mr Ouandie out of his premises and sent him to his catechist in the outskirts of Mbanga. When Mr Ouandie and his secretary arrived there the catechist refused them shelter and instead alerted the forces of law and order. Ouandie took refuge in the

banana plantations there and continued to run, hiding among banana stems and even under bridges as the population chased him in this place. At a certain point he disagreed on which path to take with his secretary and there they parted ways. When Ouandie got the news over the radio he knew that his pursuers would intensify their pursuit as they were now sure he was the one.

He managed it for two more days but hunger and thirst now got the better of him. There was no stream in sight and he needed a drink of water badly. The unfortunate thing is that after so many days on the run he had lost his bearings. When he saw a branch railway line, not knowing that the railway now branched off to Kumba, he believed he was in Nkongsamba and thought he could seek some help from the local people and pass incognito, but unfortunately everyone had been alerted. So when he met someone and asked him to take him to the village chief's house he little suspected that this person recognised him and would give him over to the forces of law and order. The man asked Ouandie to follow him. As they went Ouandie suddenly discovered that they were quite near a gendarmerie post and this man was heading for it. As he told us, he simply brushed aside his guide and walked up to the gendarme post. He entered the office and then announced: 'I am Ernest Ouandie!'

That set the whole place in panic. All the officers there rushed out of the place and ran for safety. Then they recollected themselves and came back to meet him who was now seated on a bench in the office. He simply asked them to give him water which they did. They then took possession of him and handcuffed him before entering into communication with the Command authority who hastened to meet him. In an hour or so, there was already a helicopter to take him to Yaounde. Consequently Ouandie maintained he was not arrested but gave himself up'.

Bishop Ndongmo was in Rome when Ouandie was arrested and

many thought he would not return, but as he stated, he felt morally obliged to come and share Ouandie's fate. The case against Ouandie was that of rebellion and they were termed *Le groupe de la rebellion* in the trial. Bishop Ndongmo had another axe to grind with government and headed another group which in the BMM was known as *'Le groupe de la Prière'*, or *'La Sainte Croix'*; but in court they were presented as *'Le groupe de coup d'État'*. Indeed there could not be a more auspicious time to study the BMM system and the government it served as a main prop than this one of confinement within the establishment's walls.

A year earlier arrests had started of members of *la Sainte Croix* as they called themselves. *La Sainte Croix* (The Holy Cross) was founded by Wambo le Courant in fulfilment of a vision he had seen. In the vision Wambo le Courant saw angels who descended from the throne of God and carried out a *coup d'État* against the Ahidjo regime. He was therefore asked to organise prayer groups to appeal to God for the realisation of this objective.

Wambo le Courant, who for many years had been involved in the UPC uprising, first reported the vision to Bishop Ndongmo and asked for his advice and assistance. The Bishop dismissed Wambo le Courant and told him that the vision was a result of his great longing to see the government overthrown. His own thought waves and imagination had resulted in the vision. The Bishop therefore advised Wambo to go away and think less about it.

Again the vision was repeated to Wambo and he was told that what had been revealed to him was true and inevitable and that he should set to work and organise the prayer groups as revealed. Again Wambo came back to Bishop Ndongmo and reported what had happened to him. This time the Bishop was convinced that Wambo was possessed of an evil spirit. He kept Wambo in his place for

some days and carried out an exorcist exercise on him. This is what Wambo later claimed to be an ordination and so claimed the title of an abbey.

With the evil spirit expelled from Wambo, the Bishop hoped he was free from those hallucinations. But a third time Wambo turned up again with the same story. And this time he urged with greater insistence that the Bishop should give his moral support and also help finance his tours. The Bishop thought there must be something in the Wambo story but before committing his authority he decided to seek divine guidance and so he went into prayer and meditation on the issue. He received the light from above and so gave his blessing to the Wambo proposals. On his intervention Takala Celestine made a million francs available for financing the organisation of the *Sainte Croix*. Thus equipped, Wambo le Courant set to work to organise what had been revealed to him.

Prayer groups of this *Sainte Croix* group sprang up very rapidly in the Mungo and Wouri regions as well as in the Sanaga Maritime and even extended into the Central South Province. The adherents of the *Sainte Croix* soon discovered the power in prayer and started using this for healing and attending to family and business problems. Again sight was not to be lost of the original objective why the groups were founded – that God may hasten the realisation of his revelation and execute the change in government. This story could not be told to just everybody but had to be kept within circles of confidants. Wambo readily found these among his old colleagues of the *maquis*.

All these would not escape the notice of the security and as soon as the purpose behind the prayers became known, the government arm of repression had been used to crush it. And so as early as September 1969 arrests started of members of this group. But there was nothing yet on which to build a case. Gradually a story was framed of a planned *coup d'État* by this group. Of course evidence could always be extracted to establish the 'facts'. To this the BMM

directed its efforts and by the time the Bishop was arrested there was enough for a case of a planned *coup d'État* to be established against him and this group. In court, therefore, they were referred to as *'Le groupe de coup d'État!'*

As stated earlier, there were ten cells in this BMM then. In the first there was only His Lordship Bishop Albert Ndongmo, who was permanently wearing chains on his legs and arms. When his lawyer protested, the handcuffs were removed. In cell two there was Ernest Ouandie and, with my arrival, eighteen other prisoners. The rest of the cells contained at least twenty-two and at most twenty-six inmates. If we take an average of twenty-four for the eight other cells this will give us a population of 212. But there were a number of people in the corridor. I really think there were around 240 inmates then in the BMM. Two cells - six and seven - were occupied by women.

The security arrangements were very tight. On opening the main gate from outside the first thing that struck you was the number of heavily armed soldiers who littered the compound. In the second court there were others and this also included the police post. In the corridor which lay between the iron grating and the cells, soldiers stood guard by the hour. There was one whose only concern were cells and he had instructions not to let a fly escape from these two cells. This he observed literally. Often one would see him chasing a butterfly or a moth that had just come out of one of these rooms. He always made sure he chased it until he killed it. It was believed that Ouandie might get away by turning into an insect and flying off. If the Chef de Poste came to fetch someone from our cell he was very closely supervised by the soldier then on duty at this post.

Even in the offices there were gendarmes whose duty was to escort detainees from their cells to the *enquêteurs*. These gendarmes were armed with guns and grenades. It was no time for jokes and no chances were being taken. Of course even this tense security position was seen in town in

Yaounde throughout the time Ouandie and Ndongmo were there. Rumours were rife which told that an army in support of Ouandie was soon to march on Yaounde. And so a whole battalion took cover around Yaounde. There was one thing which struck me about the soldiers and gendarmes sent to the BMM then - they were almost all from the north and none from the Bamileke region. Even Ahidjo's son who was then just out of the army school was one of the lieutenants who took up duty here. That spoke much about the 99.99% majority votes Ahidjo always scored in his elections.

Bishop Ndongmo and Ernest Ouandie were given some consideration in the feeding arrangements. Officially there were about six people on special diet then in the place. I did not find out who were the other four but their plates passed in front of our cell. They were given some normal food and often Ndongmo and Ouandie had a glass of red wine to accompany their plates. On feast days they often treated these two and particularly the bishop to something special. I remember that Christmas that a bottle of champagne was presented to the bishop by the Commissaire who claimed it was a special gift from the President. The Commissaire and some of the military officers accompanied the Bishop in partaking of the President's Christmas gift. If I remember rightly I think there was also a chicken that came with it. Yes, I think all those who had been put down for death must have received this special care and these included Takala Celestine, Ben Bella, Wambo le Courant and maybe the other chap who was executed.

For the rest of us detainees we had our normal cocoyams. They were peeled before being boiled and while the soldiers were there we had about six cocoyams each a day. Anyone who desired could be supplied salt for soup. This was served at about 1 p.m. There was no breakfast and no supper. If anyone had his own money then he could buy some food for himself. Some special women were let in, in the morning to sell us puff-puff and beans. The supply was often short

and so rationed to those who wanted to buy. Some specially trusted detainees were allowed out; they took the food from the women and sold it round the cells. Bread was often sold too and occasionally atangana bread or hard-boiled cassava paste. Cigarettes too were sold in this way but they were all the same a forbidden commodity. Actually one could not say what was allowed or not allowed for sometimes we could even be refused water. If a prisoner escaped, water was cut off from the taps and we had to sleep under the glaring light. Sometimes we used to appeal to the soldiers and they would put out the light from outside, but often we had to sleep in this light and with the stench of the unflushed latrine.

One would wonder how a prisoner could escape under these conditions. While in the cells and in these conditions many fell ill. After torture many had need of medical attention. Now and again they brought in a nurse to look at the very bad cases and often a doctor came in to check on the VIPs like Ouandie and Ndongmo, though nothing could get any of these VIPs out of the BMM. As for the others, the doctor could request that they be taken to the prison dispensary for better attention. It was on one such day that a detainee got lost within the walls of the prison and all search proved futile. Of course, this meant that for the next month no one could be taken there. Receiving medical attention is a favour, not a right, to a detainee in the BMM. There is only one thing I think the detainee has a right to both in the BMM and in the concentration camp he has a right to die.

As I have already related I left Kumba with less than a hundred francs CFA on me and this was spent on the road so that I arrived at the BMM with nothing. Fortunately when we got to Douala the gendarme officer allowed me to stay with my friend Njoyi Glory who works in the railway. It was there that I had my last good meal and then we left in the evening by the train. Do not think that six cocoyams can do much towards feeding a man. I needed money to

buy some food. At that time I was a slave to tobacco and could easily go mad if I did not smoke. I had no money and because I needed it badly I decided to sell the only suit I had brought. It was a really good suit but I gave it away for 3.500 francs. I remember Ernest Ouandie was very angry about it. He asked me what I would do when that money was exhausted. I told him God would provide and more if I was going to be staying that long in the place. I had been there only three days.

Had it been only for food perhaps I might have resisted it a bit more but the craving for cigarettes was excruciating. In those days I had been smoking the stumps thrown away by other prisoners and what stumps could they be? I also remember once when I had some money on me, yet by design or otherwise I could not procure cigarettes. All the officers I pleaded with for cigarettes refused to buy them for me, saying it was forbidden to smoke. This was the first time I damned the consequences in the place. I picked on one police inspector and insisted he must buy cigarettes for me. The Commissaire Muyakana was in his office and I wanted to call his attention. I did so by raising hell with this inspector. Soon, the Commissaire was on the scene and when he heard my complaint and saw my fury he ordered the inspector to take my money and buy me the cigarettes.

Here one really suffered starvation and much privation. In those days no visits were allowed and certainly no food came in from families. We had to depend on what the authorities supplied and six cocoyams a day was already too much - in their own estimation.

I have already narrated the various torture methods applied on the suspects. These are the ones people outside dread but there is another form of torture starvation and deprivation of liberty and what it means to many, the condition of living in fear and subjection. These are sometimes more exacting and penetrating than the physical tortures described.

When the place closed in the evening, and sometimes it was as late as 8 p.m., some calm settled on us and in it we slept. The arrival of the officers in the morning disturbed our peace but the real terror descended when we heard the office bell of the Commissaire.

They would come and fetch the first victim of the day and soon the slashing noise of the cane and the shrieking of the victim filled the air. Even in your sleep these horrors pursued you. Women as well as men were all subjected to the same torture, the women were tied on the *balançoire* and the electric current was applied to their vaginas. You heard them shrieking and crying and entreating with the beasts in human form.

This again was one of the greater sources of – torture I had in those days – to witness man's inhumanity to man descend to such depths. Sometimes at the end, these very criminals were not ashamed to admit that the victim was innocent and therefore set him free. Of course, this was the only method they knew of establishing one's innocence. Once accused you were held guilty until these methods proved you not.

This was the procedure. An officer sits in his office, either in the BMM there or higher up in the DIREDOC, and makes up a god story around someone who has to be liquidated. He then gives out this story to be established through these methods. The collaborators of the object for liquidation have to be rounded up and subjected to these tortures until they admit what they haven't the foggiest idea about. These witnesses usually cannot stand up to cross-examination by a good counsel. That is why all cases of the BMM must only go before a military court. They cannot stand the rigour of a free court, though I have witnessed where even these courts have to pronounce the sentences that are dictated from above.

I remember in the Ndongmo case I came in before one of his collaborators was questioned. It was Celestine Lingo, the editor of *L'Essort de Jeunes*. This young man was a professional journalist, trained in France, and he was working for the Nkongsamba diocese publishing their newspaper. Bishop Ndongmo was of course the proprietor and this is all that connected this young man to the Bishop. He was asked to tell them of the Bishop's coup plan as well as the assistance in arms and money which the Bishop was sending to Ouandie in the bush. When he declared his ignorance he was literally scourged. As he was passing in front of the Bishop's cell, I heard the Bishop rebuking him in a loud voice for allowing those fellows to thus manhandle him. 'What truth are you telling them, you think they are interested in truth? Sign whatever they want you to sign and let not your conscience be worried that you are lying against me'. That saved the young man further punishment because when the Bishop was speaking he was really angry and his voice rang out loud. The military officers who were conducting the preliminary investigation were there and they came out to listen to these words. When Celestine was called up in the afternoon, it was to sign his declaration and that ended his *enquête*. Of course he was my companion to Mantoum. Today he is working for *Fraternité Matin* in Abidjan.

Bishop Ndongmo understood those fellows and treated them as they deserved. Often he was called out to check on a point. First he made his declaration as he knew the facts. When they wouldn't have that he simply told them to write, what they wanted and he would sign. The BMM was out to soil the Bishop as best they could and he knew it. A lot of rubbish was spread round about him then girls whom he had helped were brought there as his collaborators in crime. They were declared his girl-friends and even dirty pictures of him and one Marie Bella were produced which a criminally minded and gullible audience accepted without

asking this simple question: how many respectable people in the community would ever degenerate to taking photographs of this act, how much more a highly respectable member of the clergy? Perhaps his brother, Bishop Jean Zoa, believed in those things, for neither in the BMM nor in the Tchollire days did he ever visit his brother nor did he send him any material or financial help.

Mane Bella was supposed to be the beauty that Ndongmo was going to use in poisoning Ahidjo at the Garoua CNU Congress. She was going to make herself available to the chosen to pass the night with the President and then take the opportunity to poison him. There was no shame in thus revealing to the world the type of person we had for a President. What an accursed nation! This girl had her fair share of torture and ended up serving five years' imprisonment. I am only narrating those few instances that struck me and added to my personal torture. Indeed I looked upon this particular story as a frame-up in bad taste by the BMM. But to achieve their objective – convict Ndongmo – they would stop at nothing; even to the extent of exposing their own filthy habits to the public.

Before concluding my remarks in this *enquête* let me narrate one incident. One evening rumours spread round that six great men were being picked up as accomplices of Ouandie. Among the names I heard were Enoch Kwayeb who a week earlier had been replaced by Ayissi Mvodo in the Ministry of Territorial Administration, there was my friend Nzo Ekaah Nghaky who was then Minister of Health, there was also Chuafe the proprietor of Mungo Hotel in Nkongsamba; I think the name of Pondi Paul who was the Director of Public Security was also mentioned and one or two others.

They were supposed to be under house arrest and were soon to join us in the BMM. Indeed bedding was bought for them and a cell was already fixed for them and the inmates told to prepare to be moved to the other cells at any time.

The next evening Chuafe was brought in but was given accommodation only in the corridor. Two days later he was released and that ended the story of the coming in of his other friends. Later on we learnt that the suspects who were to be brought in had each paid a million francs for the suspicion to be considered as having been misplaced.

This now reminds me of our informant. He was one Alhaji Ibrahim from Zaire. He told me he was a retired major of the Zaire Army who had taken to diamond-trafficking. He came into Cameroon on his private business and had visited Garoua and some other towns in North Cameroon. It appears one security officer became jealous of his gold chain and wanted to acquire it cheaply. He refused to sell it and so the man accused him of clandestine immigration. He was therefore brought there to the BMM so that he might appear in court. This man came into the BMM after me, and did not seem to be a stranger in the place. He was brought in during the night and in the morning when the Commissaire came he was called to the office. He never came back to the cell until late in the evening and when he came he brought remnants of the food he had eaten. He was on the same diet with the soldiers on guard. Each day he was let out of the cell at 6 a.m. and only brought in at 7 p.m. This did not indicate that government had the least suspicion of him at that time. Being a retired major of the Zaire army and an illegal immigrant into the Cameroon, he would have been seriously suspected as being one of the mercenaries who came in for Ouandie since it was rumoured that an army of Ouandie's mercenaries would soon overrun Yaounde.

Indeed before the arrival of this man in the cell the inmates had been warned about him by Nestor, who was a native doctor and fortune teller, and also by David, a former railway worker who could interpret dreams and foretell the future. Ouandie himself had also talked of this man who

was coming to wage a spiritual war against him. As soon as this Alhaji was introduced into the cell the signal went round that that was the man.

I think Ibrahim was brought in sometime in the second half of November. As we learnt several times, those who mattered in the CNU, that is the small clique of Ahidjo, Moussa Yaya, and two or three others, each time they met to take a decision on having Ouandie executed they could never come to an agreement. Yet individually they all believed that he should be killed. This was a sign that he was still spiritually powerful and any attempt at his life might be disastrous. In order to combat this spiritual power it was necessary to get someone right in the cell to tackle Ouandie. Their consultation fell on this Alhaji, a Zaire citizen who happened to have been in Yaounde then.

I took the forewarnings of Ouandie and the other fortune tellers with a pinch of salt. The other cell inmates took them seriously and so when this man was sent into our cell every other person had a built-in hostility against him and no one would let him sit or be near him. I got vexed at this attitude towards another unfortunate being like ourselves. I squeezed out a place near me and he arranged himself there.

A month after I arrived the BMM nobody was bothered about my being there. The Commissaire himself said he did not know why I was there. Only God had my situation under control and, deciding to turn to him and seek his intervention, I spent most of my time in the cell praying and reading the Bible. I had no English books there but I had a rudimentary knowledge of French by which I could understand the French Bible and prayer books. The more I used these books the more my French improved.

I was then a Roman Catholic Christian and my prayers consisted mainly of what I could find in the standard prayer books like the Sunday and Daily Missals, the Child of Mary, Guardian of the Soul etc. In those early days, I remember, I

could only get a copy of the Sunday Missal and every Sunday I kept all the offices of the day. In the vespers there is the reading of Psalms 110 to 113 and these I read, standing, every Sunday. One day I was reading through these vespers when I came to Psalm 111, verse 10; 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all those who practise it'.

Something in these words caught me and held my attention. This was not my first time of going through these vespers, but a certain force obliged me to stop at these words meditating upon them. At that time I knew nothing of meditation and how to commune with the inner Christ in me. But my mind went on reasoning: 'Yes, Albert, your ambition in this world has been the acquisition of knowledge and so you devoured every work you laid hands upon that you thought contained wisdom. Yet the study of the Bible eluded you and therein is the only true foundation of wisdom you could have acquired...'

When I came round I was angry that I had been distracted in my prayers. As a result of the half-knowledge of the Christian teaching I had got, I had never known that the Lord Jesus Christ could speak to you like that. Thinking that I had suffered distraction in my prayers, I came back and continued my reading of the psalms. After I had finished those readings and recitations I knew then as prayer, I sat back in my place after the last amen. As I sat down, that voice within me came back: 'Yes, Albert, you must turn to this only true source of wisdom and you have been seeking wisdom all your life. The fear of the Lord is contained in the word and you get it in the Holy Bible. Take up that study and read. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself will teach you; only ask him to do so and cast off all that you had known before now. Don't hurry; there is a lifetime to learn this word. Start now, not tomorrow.'

These ruminations of my mind made me very calm and quiet that evening. I did not join in the general discussions of the cell but went early to sleep. It was a very peaceful night I had, calm and wonderful scenes in my dreams. I was determined that the next morning I would get a Bible and start on its study. No one in my cell had a Bible. I asked Bishop Ndongmo if he could let me have a Bible permanently in my cell. He had only one and a very voluminous one so he asked Celestine Lingo and he got a small Bible for me. That very day I started my Bible study from Genesis. As I read, I made notes and later from these notes developed some of the writings that are to be found in this work. I consider this as the point at which our Lord Jesus Christ made his full entry into my life.

Thus he started and has ended up making a new man of me, completely killing the old man to the extent that my old friends and companions do not seem to understand me. But I am still grateful to our Lord Jesus Christ for what he has made of me.

With the beginning of this Bible study I now became interested in the inner voice and instead of hating it as a distraction I sought it, for it brought me a wonderful peace and bliss. I did not bother again about what was going on in the BMM or what was happening to me. It was only my thirst for the wisdom embedded in the Bible that consumed me.

The inner voice told me: 'Yes, Albert, you are here because you have been seeking power. Power is spirit and the Christ spirit is the greatest and hence the greatest power. If you want power seek it in Christ. I am the living Christ, purify yourself, sanctify yourself and you will be my special friend. I will reveal myself to you and you will see me as you see your other friends.'

This invitation was too great to be trifled with and hence forward I sought after personal sanctification and so I started fasting, a thing I had not done hitherto. As for long prayers I was born into a family where long prayers were common

daily occurrences. Thus my prayers and meditation were now supported by fasting and this quickly and greatly transformed me. And as you increase in this spiritual growth you start losing interest in earthly material things.

There is one thing noteworthy about the Christian spirit as you acquire it, or rather, as you improve your contacts with it, you develop a strong love for all around you. This love goes out to the suffering, the oppressed and the miserable. You want more and more to take over another's sufferings. It therefore came about that in those days for each stroke which fell on someone in the torture room, the sound went through me as though I had received the stroke myself. Fortunately before it became too bad, the great *'enquête* was over. I mention this here because it greatly affected my stay in the Mantoum and Tchollire concentration camps.

Back to my cell prayers, I may note here that before I came there were no communal prayers in the cell, though once every evening all the cells in the BMM listened to prayers conducted from cell four, by one of the prisoners. When I started my prayers many of my cell inmates, the witch doctors, fortune tellers, and interpreters of dreams, were rather amused. This did not worry me. Gradually a few joined me in prayer and every evening we prayed in common for about twenty minutes. This was the situation in the cell when Ibrahim came. He was happy that most of the cell members were uninterested in prayers. He thus openly made me his best friend, pretending he was happy with my praying.

This relationship went on very well until one day Alhaji had a prayer clash with me. As I said earlier, he was always let out in the morning at 6 a.m. and brought into the cell at 7 p.m. Then the Muslim fast started. This kept him out till 8 p.m. as he did all his praying outside and when he came in it was only to sleep. Just about this time too Ouandie and his fortune tellers seemed to have seen something in the

prayers I held with the other inmates and joined us. Ouandie soon developed his interest in the prayers and asked for a prayer book which was quickly fetched from one of the cells. Indeed most of those in the cells in those days would have done anything to save Ouandie's life. As I found his interest in prayer increase I took the opportunity to talk to him about God's mercy and the need for repentance. I told him he could only hope in God's deliverance and God could arrange the hearts of those who now sought his life and they may even seek his collaboration in running the state. I think Ouandie saw this as a possibility and so became fully absorbed in this spiritual revival. He had been a Christian teacher before politics took him off.

One evening Alhaji stayed late outside. I think he came in after 9 p.m. and just when I was winding up my prayers. When I finished I lay down to sleep. But Alhaji did not go to sleep this day. He arranged his place and instead started his praying all over again. I tried to sleep but sleep would not come and when at last it stole over me I felt as though there was a heavy pressure on me trying to compress life out of me. Shortly after, in a dream, I saw my Alhaji friend mount on me, seize me by the throat and begin to squeeze the life out of me. Still in the dream, I struggled with him, turned him over and, taking him too by the throat, squeezed it until he was near to giving up the ghost, then I released him. As I then heaved a heavy sigh of relief I awoke, and saw this man still seriously involved in his invocations.

I simply shook off sleep, stood up and went into prayer. My spirit told me to keep on praying as long as Alhaji prayed. I prayed, sang hymns and psalms, recited litanies; then it came to me I should speak to the Christ in my own words and so I was let into the secret of real prayer. I poured out my heart to my saviour, I recounted our share in the national struggle and the treatment we had had at the hands of those in power. I enumerated those who had been killed, not forgetting heroes like Um Nyobe, Moumie, Singap Martin,

S.A. George, Motom-by Wotele. I laid all these to the charge of those who ruled us, who these knew not God but believed in diabolic powers. I called upon him alone that can save, to come to our aid and that of the oppressed Cameroonian people. I out-prayed Alhaji, who soon gave up, took to his bed and slept. When I finished I turned round to notice that the eyes of Ouandie were fixed only on me as I prayed, raised up my hands, knelt down, lay prostrate and all. I went to sleep at once.

I slept deeply that night and got up late. Alhaji was already getting ready to go out when I came round from slumber land. He did not answer my greetings that morning, but collected his kettle and pillow and went to the door to shout for the Chef de Poste to open for him. I turned round, made my morning prayers, then got up to brush my teeth and so start the new day. When I finished my morning ablutions I came back and sat in my place. Shortly after that Ouandie called me to his side. He was very grateful to me for the great battle I had fought for him in the night. I did not quite understand him at first and so he had to explain himself. He told me I could consult Nestor or David for they would testify to his declarations.

Ouandie told me that shortly after Alhaji came back and started his prayers, three great spiritual lords arrived at the door of our cell. They peered into the cell but it appeared the door was blocked for them. They went back and brought a numberless band of smaller spirits, all fully armed, with spears, cutlasses, swords and even guns. They were all positioned along the corridor of the cell and in battle array. Just as this arrangement was going on I got up and started my prayers. This brought down another set of spirits more powerful than the first. These engaged the first in battle and a really fierce battle ensued. It lasted as long as Alhaji prayed. Then these enemy spirits were driven off and chased right out of the BMM premises. And that's when Alhaji stopped praying.

According to Ouandie these spirits came to slay him spiritually so as to make his execution easy. But by prayer I had given them battle and driven them off. This story was confirmed by Nestor and David and one or two others. Everyone who was in the BMM at that time must remember that night for its nightmares, soliciting cries and shrieks from so many inmates. That day I got a visit from the Commissaire around 11 a. m. He came to the door and asked for me, I presented myself at the door. He simply nodded his head and went away. By 3 p.m. some chaps came from the 'Direction' and repeated just what the Commissaire did. When Alhaji came back in the evening he had reserved nothing for me and again did not receive my greetings.

Ouandie and his fortune tellers, encouraged by what they had witnessed, became very enthusiastic about the common praying. We had thus to organise prayers to last longer than they had been and we waited until when it was getting near the entry hour of Alhaji before we began. So Alhaji came in that evening just when we were preparing to start praying. He too set to preparing himself to start praying. We started before him and when he started he did not go far but abruptly ended his prayers and lay down to sleep. He was very troubled and passed most of the time in sobs and utterances in Arabic which bore no meaning to me.

In the morning Alhaji found fault with me and warned me against fraternising with such a great enemy of the government as Ouandie. He told me that it was a Minister whom I took for a friend but who indeed wanted to see me destroyed who had caused me to be brought there. It was therefore very easy for me to be released once the great cases were disposed of. But if I continued in this alliance with Ouandie it would cost me much more than I had been originally engaged for.

This did not needle me at all but I was happy to see that our prayers had a superior power than all his invoking and so forth. This was the first time I was consciously waging a

battle in spirit and it pleased me a lot. Almost everybody in the cell had seen the force of prayers and so more people joined the prayer group.

But this was a bad day for Ouandie and me. During the day Ouandie wanted to have the clothes he wore washed but had no change of clothes. I gave him my loin-cloth to tie round his waist and thus cover his nakedness. And destiny was against me. That day at about 10a.m. Ouandie was called to the office of the Commissaire and as his clothes were still wet he went in my loin-cloth.

The Commissaire was furious. How had Ouandie come by the loin-cloth? And why should I give him my loin-cloth? I was called to the office. I thought I was then going for my share of torture and indeed everybody in the cell thought so. But it appears something changed the Commissaire's mind and even his barking at me was tempered as I entered his office. He gave me a seat and asked me where I knew Ouandie. I told him how once or twice I had met him in Accra and how I had wanted to persuade Dr Moumie that they should participate in the 1960 referendum and elections. The first time was before the referendum on the constitution and the second time was after the referendum but before the elections into the Assembly. I showed them that, from the results of the voting at the constitutional referendum, they stood a good chance of winning at the elections.

The only other time I met Ouandie again was in the cell. I told the Commissaire Ouandie had openly confessed in the cell that he took me for dead or in exile. And furthermore, that he had ever since regarded me as a sell-out. When then, the Commissaire asked, did I give him my loin-cloth? I was surprised at that question because it seemed to me so foolish. There was, in my opinion, nothing very special in what I had done. And I thought that even if the Commissaire were in my place he would have done the same. He warned me I had not come there to teach him his work and that such acts were very likely to cost me dear. Little did I know

that I had thus earned what was then called 'Assignment' being sentenced to the concentration camps. I was taken back to the cell.

In the evening Alhaji came in while we were praying and the atmosphere did not permit his invocation. He was infuriated, went to the door, called the guard and asked for the lieutenant on duty. He was brought and Alhaji put serious complaint to him against me. The man went off and about thirty minutes later, two toughs came from the 'Direction'. We were still praying and they shouted, ordering us to stop the prayers. The others stopped but I continued. They found out I was impervious to their threats and kept quiet till I finished praying. They then took me out of the cell and transferred to me cell nine which was directly behind this cell. And thus I parted company with Ouandie. By this time the trial in the military tribunal was already going on. Two days after I had been taken out of the cell, it was searched and some of Ouandie's fetishes were discovered. How they had found their way inside there could not be understood by the BMM authorities. Anyway that did not bother them again because they knew by this they had conquered Ouandie. Of course when I left the cell, no one dared continue the prayers.

In cell nine I met one inmate who was destined to be my companion for four years and was very helpful to me during my detention. It was Tiencheu Christophe. He was the administrative manager of Mungo Plastic, a company owned by the Nkongsamba Diocese. When the investigations on Bishop Ndongmo started, in the usual BMM methods, everybody who had any close ties with the Bishop had to be picked up. And there was also another twist in Christophe's case. He had a girl-friend who was white-skinned and these quickly attract the interest of the great, i.e. those who mattered in Ahidjo's regime. One of the greatest Directors in the regime saw this French girl and wanted to have fun with her. But that was not her own

concept of it. She thought that one boy friend at a time was enough and so turned down the advances of this Director of Directors. Little did she know the harm she was doing to her sweetheart. It cost him five years of detention.

Shortly after my transfer to cell nine the trial of the case ended. Many of the people who were detained were never presented in court and these were hoping to be released. For me, I had not yet been even informed why I was arrested, all the same I was hoping that when the mass releases were made I might be numbered among them. Not long after the trial ended judgement was delivered. Six people were condemned to death: Ouandie, Ben Bella, Wambo le Courant, Bishop Ndongmo, Takala Celestine and one other. Many petitions from abroad including those of heads of states and governments and even the Pope were sent to Ahidjo praying that he spare the lives of Ndongmo and Ouandie. This would have literally meant that Ahidjo would have no one to execute out of those marathon trials. Ahidjo could not do that. However, he reduced the sentences of Bishop Ndongmo, Takala Celestine and Ben Bella to life imprisonment. Ben Bella had obtained this pardon during the *enquête*. He collaborated very willingly with the investigators and provided very useful evidence against Ouandie.

I was forgetting something which I think Ahidjo should now be thinking of with regret. Not only did the French Socialists led by Mitterrand appeal to Ahidjo to spare Ouandie's life but they had sent in their lawyer on Ouandie's request but the Ahidjo regime threw him out of Cameroon.

I was still in the Ouandie cell when the military magistrates carrying out the preliminary investigation into the case told Ouandie he could name any Lawyer of his choice to defend him. It appears that these officers had been given the impression that the trial was going to be free and so they passed that impression to Ouandie. It was an offer the French Socialists had made to Ouandie before he moved

into the *maquis*. I have forgotten the name of the lawyer, but Ouandie told me, he gave them his name and address. This lawyer was then in Algeria and the French Socialists sent the letter and his return air ticket to him. The man arrived in Cameroon and made straight for Yaounde. He got to the BMM at about 8 p.m. on the day he arrived and this caused no small stir in the place. The Commissaire contacted the 'Direction' and the Presidency. Orders came that the man should be put on the next plane that night for Douala with someone who would ensure that he got out of Cameroon immediately even if it meant someone had to be taken out of the plane to make room for him. That was one of the first and greatest slaps Mitterrand got from Ahidjo. Surely he has paid and is still paying for it now.

The Socialist and Communists of France looked upon the UPC as their own child in colonial France and indeed treated with high consideration the bonds of friendship between the two. Yet Ahidjo rose vehemently against the UPC, assassinating Um Nyobe directly and then Moumie through the agency of *La Main Rouge*. These two personalities were very highly regarded in the estimation of the French Socialist and Communist leaders. Ruben Um Nyobe was the Vice President of the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA), which was born of Socialist concepts and nursed by the French Socialists and Communists. In all these things we may see the hand of destiny. While using De Gaulle and the Gaullists to build up his regime, Ahidjo in the very process was obliged to antagonise Mitterrand and the Socialists, thus digging his own political grave in preparation for these days.

Two days it was, I think, after the passing of the sentence, a few of those who had appeared in court and were discharged and acquitted were released. Being discharged and acquitted even by a military tribunal did not then mean you gained your freedom. Some of those who fell into that category were sent to the concentration camps.

Let me be fair to them; these concentration camps, which still exist, are called *Les Centres de Rééducation Civique*. We shall see what is the syllabus in these centres.

It was after Ouandie's execution that many people were released. The very day Ouandie and the two others were picked out for Bafoussam, the special military guard was removed but a few of the Presidential guard that had been drafted to the BMM stayed on till Bishop Ndongmo was taken to Tchollire. Even before the Bishop left, the tense atmosphere of the BMM had been relaxed. The hawkers of food could come into the BMM with less restriction and so there was often more food to sell than buyers with a purchasing potential. The inmates of the BMM could not visit the clinic in the Central prison once every week. Not that all those who needed medical care could be taken at a time but now there were more opportunities and one could hope to get a chance within a month.

More importantly, the process of releasing some of the detainees set in. A week after Ouandie's execution more than forty people were released. We were filed out of our cells and made to wait in the inner court by the police post. It was a very welcome thing for most of us. We had the opportunity to have a sunbath after several months. We waited from 10 a.m. till about 5.30 p.m. and then we were led back into our cells. Disappointment filled every heart and the first hour passed almost as though we were witnessing a funeral. Three days later they brought a list and called us out to the same court. We waited there for some three hours, then another list turned up and those whose names were called were told to sign off at the Chef de Poste and gain liberty. There was no liberty for me and several others.

I think it was after this that I was transferred back to cell two because most of the cell nine inmates stayed on. My own *enquête* came and passed without anything of significance. Note was taken of my activities as a student

leader in University College, Ibadan, and of how I had participated in the elections against John Ngu Foncha in the Bafut East constituency. I was then General Secretary of the One Kamerun Movement. It was stressed that I had been in good standing with UPC leaders and had shown much sympathy for Ouandie and his cause even within the confines of the BMM.

Even though before I was first taken out of cell two I had been taken in a dream and led along the Mantoum route to that very place, I was still hoping for release. Of course I had never been to the Mantoum camp and so could not easily understand the dream. What was the need of dreams if they did not reveal liberty to me? Another had revealed to me a situation similar to that of Joseph the dreamer. And yet another and another had revealed unbelievable things to me. Some have come to pass and others are still unfolding. But I wanted immediate liberty, not dreams and hopes.

Not much of great importance occurred again before we left Yaounde. But the longing for liberty became like the unquenchable fire of hell. No one had yet been sentenced or even officially notified of impending transfer to the political prisons. So everyone stood a chance of being released any hour of the day. And they used to release us in ones and twos. Even as late as 10 p.m. the Commissaire could turn up and release someone. By this time, too, the horror of the place had no effect on us.

Moreover the beatings were few and far between. Some of the *enquêteurs* had to beat now and again just to maintain their tempers at their normal levels. So now and again they would steal in after 6 p.m., pick out one chap from the cell and land him a good number of strokes and slaps. Sometimes they picked up a specimen from the beer parlours. If someone dared conflict with them over a girl in a beer parlour, such a one was picked and brought in for exercises and experiments. Normally when they finished with you they let you go because no one except the Commissaire and his

assistant appeared to have had the authority to arrest and detain. Once in a while these *enquêteurs* or police inspectors threw their victims into the cell in the hope that they would bribe their way to liberty.

It was always better to bribe your way back to liberty because if you stayed there till morning, they had to explain why you were in the cell and a ready frame-up of subversive utterances was their stock in trade. This could cost you a month or more in the BMM and when you were released there was nowhere you could seek redress. Indeed the Com-missaire generally utilised this power of arrest and detention to stem his periods of financial stress. He would pick one or two rich fellows in town and have a subversion frame-up on them. After two or three days in the place the victim bribed handsomely and got back his liberty. The then proprietor of Hotel Aurore in Yaounde could tell many a good yarn about such things.

It is difficult to contemplate the Yaounde BMM of those days without visualising its Commissaire Alhaji Ibrahim Muyakana. He was still an Inspector of Police by rank but did a marvellous job as BMM Commissaire. At first I hated and despised him but later on I grew to admire the relish with which he did his job. He had been completely dehumanised and he really enjoyed his role in society. Of course his position brought him power and wealth. He had free access into the Presidency and his audiences with the Head of State were regular. This very advantageous position could be easily translated into fiscal cash. His reports could make and unmake very highly placed government functionaries, even including ministers. Those seeking political favours licked his boots and paid whatever price he named. What else did Muyakana want? He was a budget controller and quite a sizable budget at that for funds were sent from the Presidency each time he presented a report showing the need. No one audited him.

Alhaji Ibrahim Muyakana could be vicious when he wanted to, brutal when in the chapel (the popular name for the torture room), he could be a clown when he wanted to clown and could play the Christian when he felt like doing so. He loved clean clothes and admired himself when he wore expensive clothing. He loved power, had it and wanted all around to know that he had power. He loved wearing jewellery and did not really despise the beauty of women, though if a woman found herself in the chapel with him her charms had no effect on him then.

Just one last story before we close this page. Once a detainee was taken to Muyakana's office and he thought it pleasant to call in the *gorille* to administer a few strokes to the young man. After just two strokes the young man vowed to the Commissaire that he had spoken the truth. Then he begged for mercy in God's name. At that Muyakana asked the *gorille* to give him three hard ones in succession. These brought the boy crawling. The Commissaire asked to be begged in the name of President Ahidjo. The boy quickly did so and dramatically the Commissaire became sympathetic; '*Oh! laissez-le, laissez-le, c'est u bon garçon, il se repentit. Voilà il reconnait Abidjo comme son sauveur, Laissez-le*' (Oh! leave him, leave him, he is a good boy, he has repented. You notice he recognises Ahidjo as his saviour. Leave him). He gave the boy five hundred francs and asked the Chef de Poste to let the young man out in the yard the whole day so that he might enjoy a sunbathe.

Muyakana himself taunted us with the story in our cell, telling us we were very stupid to be praying to a God whom we did not see instead of praying to Ahidjo who was there and would reward us immediately. The boy had received five hundred francs in the name of Ahidjo and would soon gain his liberty. But we were hoping in a God whom we saw not. He would see how that God would give us liberty. This is the very Muyakana who at times, particularly on Fridays,

would come dressed in spotless white and announce to us, that he was not a wicked man. He was an alhadji and so would not do evil. In his clownish way he acquitted himself of his dirty job in a fairly respectable way.

I think it was in February 1971 that they brought us those papers for 'assignation', i.e. being condemned to an indefinite period of detention in the concentration camps. Ours was for Mantoum and I think about twenty-three of us were on that list all fall-offs from the Ouandie and Ndongmo cases. We signed those papers and they were taken back to the Ministry of Territorial Administration. We now started waiting for the departure.

Sometime in late March or early April the vehicle arrived at about 3 a.m. We were called out and asked to sign off as our personal effects were handed back to us. We did so and boarded the truck that night, and so we left the BMM for Mantoum. Some will wonder why I can't remember the exact day we left the BMM. In this world where we lived it was easy to lose count of days. Imagine sitting there in the cell, day in, day out, subjected to the same routine. You know not when you leave the place, what is the need to keep count of days? You are like one in the land of the dead where there is no memory.

Chapter Four

The twenty-three of us left the BMM premises that day about 4.30 a.m. Among these were two friends I mentioned earlier, Tiencheu Christophe and Celestine Lingo. I think there were at least two or more women in the group, Anne-Marie and I think Rebecca, the latter a Bamileke and the former a Bulu. We had six or eight gendarmes as our guard. The gendarmes were not hostile. They even encouraged us on the way, assuring us we would find the place more interesting than the BMM. We took the route through Baria to Bagangte and then Bafoussam. This section of the route then was very bad and we had to stop at several places. It was a welcome change from the confinement. We enjoyed the free circulation of air once more as we moved. Because of the bad roads our progress was poor but we preferred that to getting early to our destination and perhaps being led into the underground according to the prevalent notion.

We got to Foumban about 5 p.m. that day and were taken to the Prefecture. There we spent quite some time as it appeared papers had to be signed. Mantoum is in the Bamoun area and so the prison falls under the jurisdiction of the Prefect in Foumban. Some torrential rainfall also intervened and so delayed our departure from Foumban. We were leaving Foumban already at night fall. The road from Foumban to Mantoum was then in very bad shape and it took us quite a long time to do the eighty-eight kilometres. We got to the prison premises at about eleven at night when the other prisoners were already asleep. We were locked up in a store where we passed the night.

In the morning we were led out of the cell at about 7 a.m. By then most of the other prisoners had gone out on *corvée* (the prison forced labour). The prison is enclosed within high walls. To the east and west ends of the enclosure you have two buildings running across and divided into fairly large rooms. Each room is about fifteen metres square and there are about five such rooms on the west which terminate in a smaller room of about five metres by fifteen metres. This originally served as a kitchen but had been converted into a dark room and punishment cell.

I was destined to spend many days in this room. The east end had but four rooms and terminated in another smaller room of about five metres square, which in our day was converted into a more intensive prison for supposedly recalcitrant chaps. I was also to spend many months in this place. One or two rooms in this building were not occupied in those days and they were handy as punishment cells for ordinary defaulters. The latrines were pit latrines with the huts built of sticks, mud and mats, and these occupied one end of the north wing of the fence. To the north-west was the dispensary. In between this and the latrines were the kitchens then in use built with sticks, mud and mats. Only one big gate opened into the prison and this was in the south. As you came in there was a building to your left which served as a place of worship in our day. To the right and a bit further down, there was another building which served as a handicraft room and store. One of the rooms in the western wall, indeed the central, double capacity room, served as a refectory.

This was the scene that was exposed to our view when for the first time we were brought out of the cell that morning. We were escorted to the office of the Commissaire which was situated behind the eastern wall just described. On being led out of the fence we noticed that there was a small block building about five metres from the wall in which the guards stayed. Here was the reception place for prisoners and if

ever one had a visitor, he waited there. We had not noticed this in the night because for security reasons our truck was driven straight into the compound. A few mat houses spotted around the compound were the habitation of the guards who were either illiterate or had spent two or three years in a primary school.

In the Commissariat there was the Commissaire and one Inspector of Police. Their business concerned only on the inmates of the prison. If any of the warders had any trouble and needed to contact the police he had to go to Malantuan about ten kilometres away. The Commissaire who was there when we arrived was a gentleman. I think he came from the Eastern Province. His Inspector of Police was from the then Central South Province. The Commissaire's office seemed to be straightforward in its work.

He received us in turn and so made personal contact with us. Our files had been handed to him the very night we arrived. After this contact with us he advised us to return into the camp and be as calm as possible. We should on no occasion allow ourselves to be agitated. He stressed that it was on this factor that depended our early release. This meant little to us for we did not know what was going to agitate us. We were brought back into the camp and shortly after that one of the prisoners who worked as a messenger in the office of the Director came and announced to the guards that the Director would see us then. We were again led out in the same direction. We went past the Commissaire's office and then further on to the Director's office.

There again we were received in turn. My turn came and I went in and saw the man. You did not need to have read psychology to know that this was a wicked man. His face told you he was a double character, a fraud, a man of the underworld. He ought to have been a prisoner in a normal prison serving a long-term sentence for any sort of crime—murder not excluded. But that morning he tried to present a

good and decent picture of himself. He spoke nicely to us, or at least to me, and promised to be of much help. He advised me not to allow myself to be misled by the trouble-shooters in the camp. He had seen quite a few Anglophones pass through the place and they were of exemplary conduct. Even his office messenger was one, from Bamenda. He had been in only for two years and there was all likelihood he would be going out when next there was a release. This revelation shocked me. Someone considered to be of good conduct had already spent two years in the place! I had thought that we might be here for three or six months. I was to learn more in the camp. When the Director had finished with us we were taken back into the camp and then allocated to different rooms.

The day's ration of food had already been distributed by those in the cells charged with that duty. So when we went to our cells those responsible had to appeal to the stores man for our day's ration. During our time at Mantoum, the prisoners were supplied raw food and they did the cooking. The food we had was corn flour, rice, yams and cassava. The yams and cassava were grown by the prisoners. The quantity varied from time to time.

The rice was a delicacy and was served once or so a month, corn flour normally came in regularly if the cassava was running short, otherwise we had cassava as the daily food. This was served four times a week. For the other three days we got either corn flour or yams. Each prisoner received a kilo or two of the cassava or yam. If it was rice every person got about half a kilo and the same of corn flour. For the soup we got three tablespoonfuls of palm oil a day, a tomato tin of groundnuts a day, a milk tin of salt a month. Sometimes fish was distributed but this was rare. One's ration was very important and if anyone refused it that was a very serious case of rebellion.

Having received our rations we had to organise our cooking. Christophe, Lingo and myself went together. Rebecca and Anne-Marie were with us in our eating arrangement. We handed the food to the women and they did the cooking. We looked for wood, fetched water and even green leaves in the bush for vegetables. We spent a week within the walls not even being allowed to fetch water from the spring which was just about three hundred metres away. We were too many in our batch and the guards had to get acquainted with our faces before we were allowed out on *corvée*.

By 1 p.m. the other prisoners started coming back from *corvée*. We were keen to know who they were. The messenger in the Director's office came from Upper Ngemba, from a village near Pinyin, and he was called George Asobo. He is still the chief of that village. One of my old One Kamerun Movement office staff was here. He was known as Mbah Asah. There was also a good Ewondo friend I had met at the Police Judiciaire in 1964 – Otto Owono Mbida, a journalist and private detective. And there was my good friend Edmond Njumesi, the Foreke Dschang – he too was here. These are all those whom I knew before. However, there was also a crop of old UPC diehards who believed in no other leader but Um Nyobe and no political party except the UPC. These were Bassas. I did not know that my activities on the political scene had filtered into the recesses of Eseka, Edea and the entire Nyong, Ekelle and Sanaga Maritime area.

These people had followed up my participation from my intervention at the United Nations fourth Committee in March 1959, the Mamfe Summit Conference of the same year, the first Pan Kamerun Students' Conference we held in Yaounde that very year and finally the Fouban Constitutional Conference of 1961.

They could recount all these events to me with exaggerations as usual. There were quite a few Bamileke people there but they did not seem to have much political consciousness. The other really politically conscious prisoners there were the Democrats of the late Andre Mbida. These were mainly Beti-speaking people although most of the Bulus there were suspected UPC militants. All these singled me out as a leader and gave me that respect. I had to do only the official *corvée* there were young men always ready to do my personal work like carrying water, fetching wood and cooking. Not that I solicited it but once they saw me trying to do something they came to my help. This was embarrassing to me for I was a very poor prisoner and could not even afford money to subsidise my diet, much less make presents to them. They did not bother about that. They went to the bush, trapped animals and made presents of some of it to me. Thanks to Lingo and Tincheu, I could eat a good dish now and again, for they received regular stores from their families. In my six years' detention I received three letters two from Helen when I was in Mantoum, and one from my eldest sister Josepha Ngwe when I was in Tchollire, announcing my mother's death.

And these prisoners would not cease from rendering me service and helping me with what supplies they had. This made me develop a very strong feeling of love for them and I wished I could do something for them. Again another factor I could not understand was why on earth were they all brought there. Most of them were illiterate, men and women. There were more than fifty people there who were over sixty years of age. Pa Batum and Pa Guinjole were surely over eighty. How on earth did these constitute a threat to the Ahidjo government? To confound matters, the Director now and again subjected these old men to a fortnight in the punishment cell. Yes, we had Vono beds and mattresses in our living-rooms but when you were sent

to the disciplinary cell you were only allowed your loin-cloth and you slept on the bare cement floor. Sometimes you were stripped naked and allowed only a pair of pants in the cell.

The day in Mantoum dawned at five o'clock in the morning. A guard came and opened the doors and the prisoners had an hour to themselves during which they went to toilet, cleaned up and attended morning devotions and if necessary boiled something to eat. This was all optional. At six we were all summoned for *corvée*. There was a certain *Marechal de Logis Chef*, who had not even learnt how to speak French. He was the boss of the guards and in charge of supervising the *corvées*. All these were decided upon by the Director and handed down for execution. We all gathered in front of the main gate and were then divided up into work groups. The work included building those mud buildings in which the guards lived and of course fetching the materials; work on the farm, cleaning up around the compound and so forth. There was a group which we nicknamed 'government officers'. These used to work either in the offices of the Director, Commissaire or Marechal or in their houses as domestic servants. This was a group apart, supposed to be highly respected but much despised by the prisoners, who looked upon them as agents of the administration.

The Director of the centre then was one Tanibi, a man from the Babouti tribe. He was the husband of three wives. I could not understand why he had become a polygamist. To me his first wife was more beautiful and presentable than the other two. She was motherly in her comportment and therefore respectable. They say variety is the spice of life and perhaps that's why people go polygamous. I have noticed this very situation in a few other polygamous homes. Tanibi had, I think, five children with the first wife. Their first child was a crippled girl who went on all fours. One of

the detainees who was a domestic there had already put her in the family way. The next child was a boy who was attending college then. During the long vacation of that 1971, Tanibi got me to teach him science and mathematics. This was because of the pressure of the mother who wanted her child to do well.

I think he picked up somehow when he went back to school and even though I later became the greatest enemy of Tanibi, his wife always had a soft spot for me.

Tanibi was a known wizard. He was not ashamed of it and sometimes freely made reference to it. He was supposed to be responsible for his daughter being a cripple. It was also rumoured that he had wanted to offer the life of that son of his whom I taught, but the mother intervened and consulted other witch doctors who immunised the boy from his attacks. The Director was a terror within the camp. When he made his appearance at the entry gate, every prisoner there crouched to the ground and the announcement went round, '*Massa i di kom*'. If he beckoned to a prisoner he ran to him and stood half bent before him to listen to his instructions. To such prisoners he played the magnanimous overlord. But a prisoner who came standing upright and dared to speak to him received a rebuff and was led to the punishment cell where he spent seven days in the special confinement.

I remember Tanibi telling me that in the early political days, that is, in the fifties, he had founded a local political party in his area. I imagined this man as one who had dreamt of one day being a head of state and having failed. Then fortune gave him the opportunity of this world of Mantoum. Here he could extract all the glory which he had dreamt of. After all, even the tin god Ahidjo of the CNU never received the type of adoration Tanibi had.

Tanibi had the right to use any of the methods of torture on the prisoners but he never did. The stick was very sparingly used and I think that during the time I spent there

with him the stick was used only on two or three prisoners. He preferred the cell and I wondered what was so frightful in the cell that cowed the prisoners thus. Of course it was the loss of seeming liberty, the liberty to go out on *corvée*, the liberty to attend the market on Sunday, the liberty to have a bath in the spring, the liberty to take a walk around the premises yes, all these were liberties highly prized by the prisoners. There was also something that made them afraid in the cell. I was to discover this later. It was Tanibi's diabolical exploits in the recesses of darkness.

Work started immediately after the distribution of *corvées* at 6 a.m. Most prisoners loved the *corvée* which carried them far away from the camp. Prisoners went as far as eight kilometres away from the camp to look for sticks, Indian bamboos, ordinary bamboos, ropes, mats, etc. Only those who were considered good prisoners were allowed to go on these long-distance *corvées*. Ten to fifteen of them were usually escorted to the bush by two guards in search of these materials. They moved off with the guards to a point where both prisoners and guards agreed to be a later meeting place. The time of meeting was also agreed on. The prisoners went while the guards too went their way. I never liked these long-distance *corvées* but my friends encouraged me to join them. I did not like the long-distance trekking and transportation of those loads was tedious. But the others thought the gains outweighed the inconveniences. The prisoners broke off in a run, hurried to where they obtained the desired materials, brought them to a point near the agreed meeting place and then had the rest of the hours for their personal exploits.

This was the time when they went into the woods to lay their traps. These forests lay near inhabited areas and the local people had lots of oranges, pineapples and related fruits which you could obtain just for the asking or in exchange for a very small sum. In some of these villages some of the prisoners had found friends, particularly female friends who

were kind and nice to them. In exchange they did some hard work for them or gave them money if they had just received some money from home. The Bamoun women did not ask much from them. Yet all over Bamoun-land we were known to be Ahidjo's enemies and it was believed that if we were not held prisoner, we would topple his government. Ahidjo was a darling to the Bamoun men and so his enemy was their enemy. But after many years of association the local people found nothing very frightful in these strangers and soon started admiring their courage and bravery.

But this did not mean anyone could escape from this prison through the help of accomplices. Far from it. A few had attempted to escape in years past before we came. They had even gone very far but finally they fell into the hands of the local people and were almost beaten to death before they were brought back.

And these were not all the benefits of these long-distance *corvées*. Prisoners also took the opportunity to drink good palm wine and even beer of Brasseries du Cameroun brew. After these exploits the prisoners came home very happy and contented. They spent the night in good sleep hoping to realise the promises of the day on the morrow. So life did not seem all that drab, as one might think.

To be thrown into the disciplinary cell was to deprive you of all that you now lived and hoped for. After all this was the only style of life you were sure of. There was no guarantee you'd ever return home alive. They talked of good conduct that earned you god marks and therefore an early return home. But many prisoners, even those who had become spies for the Director, were kept back by the reports of the Commissaire. And if you were looked upon in a good light by the Commissaire be sure that the Director sent back damaging reports about you. Each time we were advised to stay calm – *'il faut rester tranquille'* – but the agitation came from the authorities.

Yes, there was a perpetual feud between the Commissaire and the Director. I thought it was a special feature of Mantoum but I found a similar situation in Tchollire, only not so highly accentuated. It appeared to me a special design of those who conceived the concentration camps. The Director owed his allegiance to the Ministry of Territorial Administration and the Commissaire was of the General Delegation of National Security. Each department operated in conformity with the ideas of its Chief. There was no co-ordination. The Delegate gave his representative instructions in conformity with his concept of the instrument establishing the Centre which was very vague. The Director got his instructions from Territorial Administration and was the vote controller. True, the Commissaire could write reports against the Director but these were finally to be considered by his Ministry. And if he knew how to play his cards all would be well with him.

And Tanibi was doing very well. The labour in the prisons had been conceived as minimal. Indeed the text said the prisoners may be subjected to some work which made them exercise their bodies in order to maintain good health. But Tanibi had stretched it to include all forms of forced labour. Through this labour he made the prisoners produce most of their food cassava, yams, ground-nuts and some corn.

The money which was yearly voted for feeding the prisoners could now drain into the pockets of the Minister of Territorial Administration and the Director of Political Affairs. What sums got to Foumban the Director could share with the Prefect of Foumban. This also enabled Tanibi to have free labour for his farms. The Commissaire even refused to use this free labour for this purpose perhaps because the Delegate General had no share in the booty and thus advised them to stay clear. Now and again the Commissaire sent reports to Yaounde on these violations of the text and embezzlement of funds. This was intended to favour the detainee but instead it cost us quite dear.

Some of the detainees had become agents of the Director and some agents of the Commissaire and these agents even spied on the other bosses. There were, for instance, some people who daily reported to the Commissaire on what was shared out for food, some who told how many prisoners worked on the Director's farm. When the contractor arrived, and he often came in the night, part of the food was off-loaded into the official store within the fence and the balance to the Director's house. In the morning the Commissaire would be informed and the next day the information left for Yaounde with a copy to the Director who would know that this information must have been passed on by a prisoner. This brought untold hardships for us. If you were a suspected informant of the Commissaire you were simply thrown into the cell without a hearing. Fairly often, the Director sent a list of names of prisoners to be thrown into the cell. The guards came and executed the order and the sufferer had no right to know why he was being punished.

In general the *corvées* ended at 2 p.m. though some groups came back as late as 6 p.m. If their guard had no report against them all was well. On returning from work the prisoners set to preparing their meals. They could go to fetch water from the spring or even go to the warders' quarters. Only on getting out of the compound you must obtain permission from the guard on duty at the post. The guards liked those who went to their quarters because their wives sold a brew of corn and those who went there went often for this. The law stipulated that a guard must conduct the prisoner. Of course you did not take a guard there without making provision for his own drink. At 6 p.m. the main gate was locked and no more movement of the prisoner out of the camp was permitted. They remained in and had freedom to move in this inner court until 10 p.m. when the final lock-up took place.

Chapter Five

From Foumban you follow the road bound for Ngaoundere until you get to Malantuan. A little descent gets you to this town which lies just ten kilometres from the prison. Here the road branches off as the main northward-bound road picks up a small elevation to Magba. It is a plain that runs from Malantuan to this prison and beyond. By the time we were there a few villages had sprung up round the place, but when the prison was first put there, there were no habitations for five kilometres around except for the palace resort of the Sultan of Foumban built at the confluence of the Mbam and the Nun about five kilometres from the prison. The sultan called this resort of his the Mantoum Palace and from that came the name of the prison. That is also the source of the rumour that the prison is on an island. Incidentally the Tchollire prison is also surrounded by two big streams.

The first long-distance *corvée* I joined was the one that brought me to this palace. At that time the sultan had got some consultants in to build a retainer wall to control the washing away of soil from the banks at the point he had built the palace. The building had been put up to cover the triangular piece of land shaped out at the confluence of the two rivers. I quite enjoyed the exploits around the palace then. The sultan was there at that time but his people were not hostile to our intrusion. Indeed they were quite friendly and answered any questions we put. One could understand why the local people were never hostile to us unless one mistook their kindness as a licence to escape from the prison.

Quite near the camp, about five hundred metres away, the authorities had set up a market where people could come and sell their goods to the prisoners. This took place every Sunday and permission was granted only to those who had maintained a good record during the week. All the prisoners loved attending this market and coming into contact with free people. Also on sale there were corn brew, palm wine and even beer which they drank with relish. Fairly often the warders led back one prisoner after the other who had got drunk and become disorderly. Yet they would not give up the drinking.

Here too in the market they met the young girls of Bamoun-land whose beauty was famous. And these girls were quite infatuated with the contacts with us, for there was a general impression around that we were mostly highly educated people and prominent politicians from our own areas. Even here in the market as well as at *corvée*, the secret agents were always at work. Gathering information about what did not exist. Picking words from people's speeches so that they could be examined for the purpose of discovering subversion.

After our first meeting with the Commissaire and the Director, we were later invited individually for a chat with these authorities during which they tried to examine with you the offence of which you were suspected. So it was that I had a second turn there. When I told the Commissaire that I did not know why I had been arrested and sent there he admitted to me that the file he had received on me did not make much sense. He said that maybe a fuller file would be sent later. I explained my case, telling him that I had indeed ceased to be interested in politics and therefore could not understand the action. He told me I had the right of petition and I could use that channel to address myself to the Head of State. My petition anyway must be in French so that he could understand everything I said before transmission.

The Director was surprised at my being ignorant of the cause of my detention. He reminded me that we had certain ill-conceived ideas of independence. We had taken independence for anarchy and disrespect to the public institutions. That is why the centre continued to be necessary, to help us efface those ideas. The centre had been originally conceived for re-orientating young men and women caught from the *maquis*, before re-introducing them into society. But its existence had proved useful to several classes of the old core of politicians. He then informed me that in 1964 he had received papers of my being assigned to that prison. But I never turned up. He wondered what had happened. He advised me to go and remain calm and my case would be sorted out within a fairly short time.

This indeed was the truth about the politics of the place but I took it as rubbish. I followed the advice of the Commissaire and addressed a petition to the Head of State. This of course had to be done through the Director, and also making a copy available to the Commissaire.

This was the beginning of my woes in Mantoum. In my petition to the Head of State I pleaded ignorance and expressed surprise that I had been picked up from Kumba and now, after six months in the Yaounde BMM, found myself in Mantoum. Since the petition had been written and submitted to the Commissaire, the Director could not ignore it. He had to transmit it. He received it from me and reminded me he had advised me to keep calm. All these writings would only complicate my case for this was a sure sign of rebellion. I had accused the government of being unjust and unfair and that was why I had been sent there. On the contrary, the petition proved the case of the government that I had not learnt submission to higher authority. I was still in a fighting mood. What was all this petitioning about? Was it not to show the government that he had made the place so cosy and relaxed that we could now embark on this petition-writing? He had already warned

me and I had no one to blame. I had to stay seven days in the penitentiary cell after which I should learn how to write petitions again.

The prisoners then in the camp were scandalised as the guard led me from the office directly into the punishment cell. Information went to the Commissaire that I was in the cell and his agents came to find out from me. I told them the story and they took it back. I think some wrangling went on between the Commissaire and the Director. After three days the Director sent for me and I was taken to his office. He again calmly advised me that he was the boss in the place and I should not be taken in by what those other fellows pretended to be ('other fellows' referred to the Commissaire), I should listen and abide by what he told me and things would go well with me. He had shown mercy towards me as this was my first offence, but in future he would be more severe. He ordered that I be allowed to go back to my normal room.

Once in the cell, it was forbidden for other prisoners to have any communication with you. For the agents of the Commissaire to contact me, one was sent with my meal; he came and stood at the door and tapped. When I answered he told me the Commissaire wanted to know why I was in the cell. While he was talking to me, another prisoner went to fetch the guard who came to open the cell. And so the presence of the other in the area looked quite legitimate.

There were quite a number of fairly well educated people in Mantoum at this era. Some had been in the former Prime Minister Mbida's party of 'Democrats' and among them were civil servants. These elite members were not liked by the Director and they were often thrown into the cell by him. It appears that this was part of the syllabus for fairly often too he threw into the cell those whom we took for his friends. With the arrival of our group these intellectuals seemed to have found a force that brought them together in discussion. So after 6 p.m., one often saw a group of them

sitting together discussing points of common interest. In general not more than two people were allowed to be seen standing in the yard and talking for long. They would be deemed to be plotting some rebellion and so would earn some days in the cell. That is why these groups of intellectuals had to sit on the sand in the yard. But soon the goings-on were reported to Tanibi. He sent his boys round to pick words from the discussions and bring to him.

Suppose in your discussion you used the word 'inadmissible', and this word was reported to Tanibi. He put it into the laboratory and came out with a subversion statement. You would be called to the office and the word put to you and you were asked whether you remembered using it. You would have no alternative but to remember and then he would supply you with the rest of your declaration in which you had declared that the government policy was inadmissible and surely it could not justify the existence of the detention centres. There would be no need denying it because this would be the declaration that went into your file and you would be thrown into the cell. The camp became really agitated and Tanibi created a '*Quartier Spécial*' for this group of intellectuals.

This special prison within the camp was in the room five metres by five metres in the south end. A fence was built to enclose this area and it now constituted a 'special quarter' where the inmates were permanently confined. They had their own court of about five metres by seven metres and a small enclosure was made to contain a bucket for human waste. Those who lived here could not cook their food and had to depend on the good will of friends in the outer camp. They did not go out for *corvée* but were in permanent lock-up.

Soon after the creation of this *quartier spécial* most of my friends were thrown inside. Tiencheu Christophe was a foundation member, then Otto Owono Mbida, Zang Martin and even Abengono Alphonse who was thought to be in good standing with Tanibi. I forget whether I went in first

or Lingo did but we managed to stay out for a bit longer. The truth is that I loved this *quartier spécial*. Everyone else seemed to hate it and wanted the limited freedom of going out on *corvée* and going to the market, but these had no attractions for me. All to me was confinement since I found no fun in all those things that interested them. It is true that I had no money to pay for the pleasures of drink and women, but there were other prisoners ready to indulge me. I just did not feel like it. I could not imagine any pleasure I could derive in these conditions separated from my wife and children at their tender ages. And so all those things meant nothing to me. I preferred the *quartier spécial* because there I was saved from the forced labour, and there was less agitation in this small circle.

But I could not gain early admission there for the agents in the place did not like reporting me. In general nearly all the four hundred and more prisoners there loved me and accepted me as an elder whose opinion was to be respected. They had also recognised that I was much pained that they too had been brought there in the name of political prisoners. They all knew that if there was a sacrifice I was called upon to do on their behalf, I would do it. Often, I tried to convince the agents to desist from carrying on their reporting of fellow prisoners. I tried to show them that we were the oppressed and the authorities were our oppressors. It was wrong for us to help our overlords in their job. Most of them took on this job in the hope of being recommended for early release. Fortunately there was one Basek Henri there who had served alternately as agent for the Commissaire and the Director and yet had already put in six years in the place. And still there was no likelihood of his going when the next release came. When all was said and done, they saw in me someone who genuinely sought their individual interests and so refrained from reporting on me.

I was also fortunate in that I had nothing that particularly interested me. I had no interest in drinking, none in the women around, none in anything. I only wanted my liberty to be away from that place. Indeed my spirit revolted against the very existence of the place. The government had no right to keep a single soul there. And so I made the prisoners understand. No! I took pains to tell them that the constitution, to which I had been a party in its drawing up, gave the government the right to imprison people only after they had had a fair trial. The institution in which we found ourselves had no legal backing. Even the Parliament of nominated deputies had never authorised the government to detain people for such long periods without trial. I assured them that one day this government of tyrants would be overthrown and they would have the opportunity of seeking legal redress and compensation for this heinous act against the constitution of the Federal Republic of Cameroon.

Nonetheless I could not escape the *quartier spécial* for long and after all I loved it. There was one young man who came along with us. I had a fondness for him because of his age. He was one Jean Bosco Effa, an Etone. He was twenty-two years of age and had already got his Brevet Elementaire, he told me. He had attempted the Probatoire and failed and was attending evening classes in Yaounde before he was picked up. It appeared he had been serving as an information agent for these very BMM and DIREDOC chaps. But it appeared he had fallen on some information which was dangerous. This story hurt me a lot. Here was a young Cameroonian, not yet unfolded, but these fellows had already put him on the wrong side. They were using him in this underworld and showing him how lucrative it was. As he narrated to me, they got money on the cheap each time they had to track a chap. They received enough money to pay for nights out for themselves and their girlfriends. They drank to their fill and paid for the drinks of their prey if she

should accept their drinks. And of course they were well fitted out as prosperous businessmen. So they tracked you and introduced topics of politics. Inevitably at some stage you would say a word or two against Ahidjo or his policy or the declarations of a Minister.

I had talked to this boy even back in the BMM and he was resolved to change. He had even began to look upon me as a father. When we got to Mantoum I was able to control him only for a short while. I think it was not even four months before he joined the team of informants. He was an informant to the Director and so had a strong position in the camp. I talked to him seriously and he stopped it. The reason why got to Tanibi and that decided him. I was thrown into the *quartier spécial* and there and then was numbered amongst the enemies of Tanibi. Perhaps the situation was aggravated by the fact that the Commissaire thought I had been of respectable conduct since they were getting no reports against me. It appears that when someone was thrown into the *quartier spécial*, his stay up to then and including the duration of stay in the *quartier* were counted for nothing: i.e., until you came out of *quartier spécial* you were not deemed to have arrived at Mantoum yet and so the prospects of your release became very remote. This I did not know. Anyway, since coming into the place I did not consider the local authorities to be responsible for prolonging my stay, but I held that when my time came as designed from above I would leave the place.

This attitude helped to maintain my self-respect and even commanded the respect of authorities. I was not very angry with Tanibi for putting me in the *quartier spécial*, but he seemed to have counted me as an enemy number one from the time he sent me there. I had already been to the disciplinary cell two or three times before this, for we were already in February 1972 when I was thrown into that *quartier*. The Commissaire had as yet sent no one into the

quartier spécial but shortly after this he found it necessary to put in Basek Henri and even my young Effa. These two characters came in to disturb the place with reports to the Director and soon afterwards life became unbearable here too. We had kept a sort of silence there and as no reports went out, no one was thrown into the solitary cell. But when these two chaps came, they brought in this turbulence and so the Director started throwing us into the solitary cell. My advice to Effa could not get through to him because of his need for food. He had no one to send him funds from the outside world and I myself depended on the goodwill of others and so could not take, him on. But the Director gave them a weekly living allowance for reporting on their fellow-prisoners.

Suffice it to say that the situation got so bad between me and the Director that even when I became sick he would not allow my transfer to the Fouban hospital. I was suffering from painful piles and I also developed acute toothache. This really tormented me. Fortunately someone taught me some herbal treatment for the toothache which I applied. But before then the Commissaire had insisted and an application was made to Yaounde for my removal to the Yaounde Central hospital as the Fouban hospital could not attend to dental cases.

Tanibi would not even buy the drugs which the resident nurse prescribed and even though the nurse recommended that I be taken up to the hospital, Tanibi refused. Friends were forced through pity to buy these drugs for me time and again. My plight was daily reported to the Commissaire and the Director. The Commissaire even had to exchange some hard words with the Director over the issue. In the end Tanibi gave in and allowed me to be transferred to the Fouban hospital. I think this was in late April 1972. The doctors there decided I needed an operation but no detainee was to be operated on without the permission of the Director.

In the hospital the 'assignes' as we were known had rooms in the isolation ward. There guards kept regular vigilance over us. But no operation case could be kept there. If someone was to be operated on he had to be kept in the block for operation cases, and there was no arrangements for guards to be there. There was no special bed or section for assignes. Tanibi used to refuse operations for those he did not like, saying he could not allow them to mix freely with free patients. And so it was with me. But he allowed me to stay in hospital since at least I was being provided with some drugs. May came and soon Ahidjo announced his intention to change the constitution and immediately fixed the referendum for 20 May. While in the hospital we had the opportunity to listen to the radio.

I was very angry with the proposed change of constitution. I considered it a further betrayal and enslavement of the Anglophone Cameroonian who had ever since lost the right to be consulted on his destiny. I listened in to the support Muna gave it and how he denounced the unnecessary expenses his position of Prime Minister of the Feder-ated State of West Cameroon caused on the national budget. Those speeches pained me and even forced words of condemnation from my mouth. As long as this remained within prisoners it was all right but the climax was reached on voting day. News of the massive voting in favour of the change came over the radio and we were fed with this rubbish the whole day. I happened to have been allowed that day by the guard in charge to accompany those prisoners who went to make purchases in town. I passed by two polling booths and the numbers there were scanty. And this was in Foumban, one of the strongest holds of Ahidjo's support.

Again when the reports came out we were told of the heavy voting that had gone on throughout the day as people thronged the polling stations to give their massive support to President Ahmadou Ahidjo. Then I was indeed very far

from being a Christian. I hated even to hear his praises sung over the radio network. I burst into outright condemnation of this traitor. I lamented the fact that Cameroonians, once a dynamic people, an intelligent and upright people, had been brought so low by this rogue. I cannot recall all I said but the remarks were pungent. The guards on duty heard me, for I was in a fury, and tried to silence me, warning me that those declarations were subversive and would cost me dearly if they got to the ears of the Director. Instead I was inflamed against them and insulted them. They could not bear this and took note. Two days later Tanibi turned up and the story was reported to him. When he asked me I confirmed that it was all true. He was going to blow very hot but was so shocked at my admitting it that he simply ordered me to pack my things and follow him back to the camp. He could not expose such an opponent of the regime to contact with loyalists.

And so I was taken back to Mantoum in all my horrid aches. I had expected that on arrival Tanibi would send me straight to the dark room cell, not the ordinary penitentiary cell, but funnily enough he asked for me to be taken back to my *quartier spécial*.

I think even the devil respected my honesty. The average *assigné* would have been denying the story and pretending to be loyalist. But I knew the guards had reported less than I said and I was ready to say worse things in Tanibi's hearing. However, this magnanimity on Tambi's side was only apparent. Two weeks later he ordered that I be put into the dark cell and that I should be there alone. Because of the surrounding walls and the dispensary building which stood in front of this room, this end room of the western wing building, earlier described as the original kitchen, was very dark inside when the door was closed. At night the darkness was total.

Life in Mantoum was agitated and did not permit much concentration. Hence my Bible studies could not proceed well there. But when I was in the *quartier special* and in the hospital in Foumban, I enjoyed relative calm and so I resumed my Bible study. Again in the *quartier spécial* I had the opportunity to address myself to the study of French, and my friends like Lingo, Otto and Tiencheu were very helpful.

Tiencheu himself was bilingual and thus proved very useful to me. I think I also wrote another petition while here. That is the only reason why I sometimes felt bad when I was cast into this dark room cell. But at this time, without any formal instruction, I had started taking delight in meditation and contemplative prayer, and thus rather welcomed these solitary moments in the cell. Again I was just starting to learn fasting and keeping away from groups offered me less temptation. In my fasting I ate only once a day. In fact this used to be a punitive measure on *assignes* put in the cell. Sometimes orders would be given that they be served one meal a day. In my case I opted for it and some days as the Spirit directed, I did dry fasting, going for twenty-four hours with neither food nor water. This greatly embarrassed Tanibi who thought very little of Christian worship.

After two weeks in the cell my pains were greatly reduced and I enjoyed relatively good health. This time I spent a month there and was taken back to the cell. From this time on till I left Mantoum in November for Yaounde, my time was spent alternately between the *quartier spécial* and the dark room cell. After some time, Lingo and Otto were released from the *quartier spécial* and sent back into the open camp.

It was like being released from prison when you returned to your room; and there was rejoicing with friends. This had particular significance for those who had girl-friends. There

were a few women there at the time. I think their number never rose above forty even when there were over four hundred prisoners. And these women were attached to some men. The law insisted that no woman have more than one male partner at a time and they were expected to declare their relationship to the Director who thence forward protected their interests against other intruders. These men visited the women's room at 5 a.m. just when the cells were opened.

These relationships had their complications. The men of course had to bear the extra expense of the women's food and sometimes children came along too and they had to make the normal preparations.

As I have indicated, prisoners who had true friends outside received financial support from them. Such help was passed over to the wives or mothers of the *assignés*, who sent it to them. We wrote and received letters, only all communications went through the Commissaire. It appeared that investigations were opened on those who wrote to us. It was self-evident, from the government standpoint, that anyone who helped us was an enemy of the government. So I preferred not to write to anybody. When I got to Mantoum, I wrote to Helen and asked her to send me some clothing, which she did and when I was sick I also asked here to send me a little money for drugs. She sent me 3500 francs. I knew I had left no money behind and if Powercam paid her any money the sum was small for the maintenance of the children. Thus I could not expect anything from outside prison. Here in Mantoum some prisoners gained income through making and selling articles like baskets, bags, boxes woven out of grass, but I was no good at handwork. Those who did trapping could sell some of their meat. I was no use in any of these. But God was wonderful, all prisoners from the lowest to the highest came to my aid, and so I did not fare too badly materially.

Another aspect of life in Mantoum that might interest the reader was Christmas and New Year. On Christmas Eve as well as on New Year's Eve, lock-up was delayed till about 2 a.m. Traditional dancing went on from 8 p.m. till midnight when the church services began.

At about 10 p.m. these dance groups moved to the Director's premises and continued dancing till midnight. On these nights too the Director served them drinks. Generally at such feasts some fish was provided as well as rice in the ration. What interested me was to see the fervour with which these unfortunate people danced. They always lived in the hope of returning home one day to enjoy these things again. Some of them had their traditional dresses which they wore on such occasions. Those who had suits turned out in them.

All this was different from my approach to it. I was here in the land of the dead where there was no joy, nor even the memory of it. I lived in the hope of a resurrection when I should live a new life whose mode I knew not.

I think in 1971 no one was released from Mantoum but people were still being brought in, in twos and threes. After the referendum there was talk of a massive release. This was realised on 18 July 1972 and then rumours started filtering in to the effect that Mantoum would be closed. At about this time, too, the Commissaire went on leave. Before he went it appears his services had laid hands on evidence of embezzlement on the part of the Director. Indeed they had about four serious charges against him and wanted to lay hands on him. So when the Commissaire went on leave, another one was sent to follow these things up. This one was called Medjo. He was really a smart guy, and he was swift in the work he did. Things tightened up on Tanibi and we were hoping that soon he would be arrested. But there we miscalculated the powers of this wizard and his props in Yaounde.

We had farmed quite a lot that year, and had a good yield of yams. More than twenty hectares of cassava were planted and a fish pond was dug and planted. This was a big achievement for Tanibi. He even made a gesture and closed down the *quartier spécial* for a fortnight. Things did not seem to improve. Tanibi decided to go to Yaounde because he had been informed his Ministry had been requested to authorise his arrest.

Tanibi got ammunition and took two of the prisoners with him. They went into the forests around and carried out a war against the monkeys as well as other animals. He brought them out in hundreds and had several groups of *corvées* to fetch wood. These animals were dried. He went to the yam farm and harvested a lorry-load of yams. He got the Land Rover and filled it with the meat, and took off with this and the lorry-load of yams to Yaounde. He was away for a week and by the time he came back his shoulders were high. All those he suspected had been rejoicing were thrown back into the *quartier spécial* and that ended the "whole story".

Tanibi became more furious against those whom he had picked out as his opponents. He threw us into the punishment cell with an unpre-cedented rapidity. Now, bags of rice and drums of oil were regularly moved in broad daylight out of the prisoners' food store to his house. And when he travelled to Foumban he would come and pick up a bag of rice and a drum of oil saying it was for the Prefet of Foumban. As I had said, you were never told why you were thrown into the cell and of course you had no one to appeal to. My young friend Effa became more agitated as he was urged on by Tanibi. This boy was no longer even hiding it and now openly threatened that he would report you to the Director. Of course by this time too he extorted bribes from *assignés*. I became really angry with Effa and threatened him with a beating. Reports of this went to the

Director who threw me into the cell. This time he warned me that I should cease looking upon myself as a UPC leader charged with the responsibility of protecting my followers. He again warned me that I should understand I was still far from any hope of release and if I did not change I would die in Mantoum. At this I was quite angered and flared up, telling him he was not God and that when God's time came I would go out.

Tanibi was much amused by my assertion and told me that if I was looking forward to the overthrow of the regime I should have to wait a hundred years. This time he told me that I was going to be thrown into the dark cell and that he would make me feel the power of darkness. I did not care a hoot about his threats. My spirit longed more and more for solitude and communion with my God. This he did not know.

At 6 p.m. my food was brought to me. I prayed and took my meal. I then placed the plates on a platform which was originally used as a pantry. I came back to where I had made my couch and sat down in meditation until I fell asleep.

I was awakened by a rattling of the plates. It seemed as though they were dancing on one spot. I suspected that rats must be around and so I moved over there to chase them away, feeling my way through. To my dismay I noticed that the plates were well arranged just as I had left them. How could rats have interfered without scattering them? Hardly had I come back to my couch when again the plates started dancing - or so the noise made me believe. First they rattled as though moving in one direction and then in the other. My mind quickly recalled how Tanibi had told me he would make me feel the power of darkness. At that thought I laughed. I stood up, lifted up my hands and with my face turned upwards I called on my God to show that there is none other than him. I prayed to him to chase far away from me the Prince of Darkness and his servants and so

lead me into a calm and peaceful sleep. I was still praying when the rattling noise danced towards the far end of the cell and died away there. After my prayers I went to sleep and slept calmly till dawn.

At about 9 a.m. Tanibi came round on an inspection of the camp. He entered my cell and walked round peering into all corners; found nothing of note and went away without a word. At about 6.30 p.m. that day I received a newcomer. Another prisoner was introduced into my cell. I was angry at this intrusion on my solitude. It was one Andre, a stooge and spy of Tanibi. He pretended to be in on punishment. He told me a silly story of what happened at *corvée* and so Tanibi had ordered his being thrown into the cell. I asked why he had been brought to my cell when the Director had specifically instructed that I was to be alone in the cell? Well, he was not the one who kept the keys and if the guard ordered him into my cell he had no choice.

That evening I took the opportunity to warn him against the practice of reporting on our brethren. We had to look at all prisoners as constituting the oppressed. If the Director loved him why had he not been released yet? He had already put in five years. I warned him that when this regime was overthrown there would be a commission of inquiry to investigate this torture and detention of Cameroonians. Those who now served as spies for the Director would be ranged with the regime then.

I told him to expect the diabolic manifestations of Tanibi in the cell. I informed him about the rattling of the plates the night before and told him not to fear when he heard them. I invited him to join me in prayer before we lay down to sleep. Again I was awakened by the rattling of plates. I rose up in prayer and the results were the same as the previous night. In the morning Andre was taken out of the cell and that night no more plates rattled. Two days later I was taken out of the cell and taken back to my *quartier spécial*.

About early November 1972, Tanibi was preparing to go on leave. I cannot now remember what I was supposed to have done and Tanibi threw me into my solitary cell. (It was now known as my cell.) I had been there for thirteen days when Tanibi brought round the Second Assistant of the Prefecture in Foumban, who was going to run the Centre for one month while Tanibi was on leave. Tanibi told the man I was to remain in the cell until he came back from leave. Turning to me, he said that when he returned from leave he would decide the duration of my cell stay.

The flesh is generally weak and did not receive this statement well. I felt in need of some sun. An inner voice advised me to appeal to my God for he would surely come to my help. I there and then decided on a dry fast. I had not yet touched water since morning. This fast was to go on for three days and I was sure the Lord will come to my aid. I prayed and fasted that whole day. In the evening when my food was brought I told my friends not to worry about food for the next three days. This shocked the attendant guard who tried to advise me against this suicidal act. I told him nothing harmful would happen to me.

The next day I spent in prayer and meditation. About mid-day I sat meditating on my late sister Margaret. At a certain stage of my meditation, as I appealed to my ancestors, I burst into tears and wept for the better part of an hour. After that I fell asleep and slept deeply and profoundly. When I awoke I felt a certain air of being refreshed and having gained confidence in myself. That night I slept calmly. At 5.30 a.m. I heard a knock at the door of the cell and asked who was knocking. My friend Otto answered and told me a message had come from Yaounde the previous evening to the effect that I was to be transferred to the Yaounde Central hospital.

He therefore advised me to suspend the fast, eat and fortify myself for the journey. I thanked him for bringing me the news. Then I turned round and thanked my God

who had so hastened to my call. At about 9.30 a.m. I was led out of the cell and told to wash my things and prepare to be moved to the Yaounde hospital. It was for the dental treatment for which I had applied in March. This application, made many months ago, now served as the means which God used to give me some rest. The next day I was handed over to a gendarme who had to escort me to Yaounde.

Chapter Six

We got to Yaounde the day after we left Mantoum, travelling along the Bangangte/Bafia road. I was taken directly to the Yaounde Central hospital as the gendarme thought the Ministry of Territorial Administration had already made arrangements for my reception there, but nobody knew of my coming and so he took me to the BMM and there deposited me. It took about another ten days before Muyakana could send me to the hospital. I was taken first to the dentist who in two days had finished with me and extracted my aching tooth. In those days I was fortunate to contact Professor Victor Anoma Ngu who accepted me as a patient and agreed to operate on me for my piles. He arranged a bed for me in Pavilion Le Rich for 16 December 1972. On that day I was moved from the BMM to the hospital and left there with no guard to enjoy the largest measure of liberty I had ever had in the preceding two years.

Professor Ngu operated on my piles on 20 December and afterwards said that I could stay in the hospital as long as possible; if possible until I was discharged. And it so happened that I stayed here till June, 1973.

Anyway as soon as I got to the hospital I tried to send a message over to Helen in Kumba. I wanted her to come to me with the children so that I might see them. Several messages went but no one came back to tell me the answer. After Christmas my friend Professor Lantum was going to Kumba and was travelling by car so I begged him to bring back my family for me. He assured me he would do so. He returned before the New Year and told me the truth. Helen

was in an advanced stage of pregnancy and that was why she could not come. He advised me frankly to forget about her till I had sorted out my prison problems. The story was true, and advice sound, but the fact was hard to bear. I never knew I had such weakness in me. I never wept but inwardly I felt worse than weeping. I had thought love and devotion was something for the young or those without a serious mission in this life. But here and now lost love tormented me. I was upset for more than a week.

Here in the hospital friends could come to see me as there was no visible guard around. I often went out, too, to visit friends in their houses, that is if they were not embarrassed by my coming. As I learnt later from a very high top security officer, there were several people spying on me and reports were made about me daily to the Head of State. This very much shocked me for sometimes I liked to believe that these things were being done to me because the Head of State was not fully informed about me. To learn that everything was known to him was very revolting and this embittered me all the more against Ahidjo and his regime. I had to learn more about these concentration camps. They were the personal prisons of Ahmadou Ahidjo. It did not matter how you got there: maybe the prefect of your area sent you there, maybe the BMM of your area sent you there, maybe, as in my case, the DIREDOC sent you there, maybe a Minister or Governor sent you there. Once there you were the prisoner of the Head of State and could only be released after his consent had been obtained.

Thus it was exactly at the pleasure of the very Ahmadou Ahidjo whom I presumed ignorant of my fate, that I was being held.

While in the hospital I tried to make some political contacts in the hope that these could bring my release. These included the President of the National Assembly, Mr S.T. Muna, and the Hon. Minister of State Emmanuel T. Egbe. I even went to Mr Muna's office and he received me, gave

me some money and promised to look into my detention. No one knew why I was detained. Yet after several months of my stay in the hospital even Mr S.T. Muna who was then constitutionally closest to the President of the Republic could bring me no results.

Mr Egbe, then Deputy Minister of Justice, lived near the hospital. He had been a long-time political friend and was still one of the few who welcomed me to his house. So I was often there in the evenings. Sometimes he invited me to lunch. I remember meeting his heads of services at lunch one afternoon. He still received me well and introduced me to them as a detainee from Mantoum. This gave me some confidence in him. For many friends still treated me as an untouchable, unapproachable, one with whom if found you would be in trouble. Indeed it was this attitude that later obliged me to take the action I did by which I was forced back to the BMM.

The food in the hospital was not very good and even though my distant cousin Emmanuel Ngam Ndi, who was then working in the Ministry of Establishment in Yaounde and was also living near the hospital, had made provision for feeding me in his house I found out that as time went by and the prospects of my being released were getting more and more remote, he developed some reluctance. And indeed I was very sensitive to it. There were only two who cared less and were happy each time to see me; these were Mr Egbe and my long-time friend Sankie Maimo. Mr Maimo came at least twice every week to see me and sometimes took me out. Indeed it was through him that some Ministers preferred to contact me.

As I said, I was a fairly regular visitor to Hon. Emmanuel Tabi Egbe's house and I think he is one of the few friends who has kept up with me for long. Even though today we are not publicly torn apart something appears to have done a deadly wound to our friendship. My becoming a member of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is what has put us

apart, but I hope that God may one day let his light shine on this son of his for indeed he consoled me in my hour of distress. I always had a ready meal in his place and a ready drink too. I remained the family friend that I had been from the late fifties when he was Personnel Manager in the CDC.

There too in his house I found new treasure-books on metaphysics and mysticism. As I said I had started meditative and contemplative prayer in Mantoum without having read of it. The spirit had led me into it even from the BMM days, I had been introduced into the ecstasies of spiritual communion without understanding it. Here in Mr Egbe's house I got many books that discussed these things and so I fell to devouring them. I was indeed excited with their message and I read them with a rare avidity. He allowed me to take his books to the hospital and when I took a book up, I would scarcely stop except at meal times or when a friend came or at hours of meditation. This study went side by side with my Bible study twice over. And so I perceived a special illumination in these works and the meditations that followed.

As a Catholic I had received the sacrament of confirmation in 1945 but I still lived without that illumination that comes from the Holy Spirit. That is when I believed I was spiritually baptised into the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star. There was a big stone between Pavillon Le Riche and Pavillon Haut Standing in this hospital. I loved going out at night to sit on this stone in solitude and meditate. One night, I think it was in January 1973, there was very bright moonlight in the sky, I came to this stone and sat down to my meditation. I prayed and called upon the light of lights to shine on me. I prayed very hard, and I do not know why I was so fervent in requesting that the unique spirit of the universe should overshadow me. I had not yet read of its effects in those books. All of a sudden I felt embraced in love, by one untouchable, unseen. I felt his presence, I felt the loving embrace and he was

there but I neither saw him nor could touch him. There was no fear in me, only a strong urge to remain in that state, unseparated from that embrace. Yes, I knew he was there, he was love, he was spirit, he had visited me. I little understood this then but I longed for it often thereafter, and although he did not come often, when he came he consoled me and soothed away all my sorrows.

There was another friend who provided me with some reading materials about the Rosicrucian. This was Mr Clement Njob of the Research Institute. He came to me too, fairly often, and loved discussing his lessons with me, though he thought my spiritual elevation was much higher. However these metaphysical studies urged me to writing. Later when I transferred to the BMM, I dilated on Christianity and also produced the pamphlet that I had published in 1979 entitled 'Meditating with Mary the Mother of Jesus the Christ'. With this spiritual contact my search of the unknown was intensified and the avidity of its quest became insatiable. When I was picked up and taken back to the BMM, I lost touch with these books but later in Tchollire I met a Mohamedan mystic who continued to fill this thirst for knowledge in me. Yes, it was good to acquire all that was available before sifting.

I may note that at this stage, while I read the Bible for the acquisition of wisdom, the prospect of having Christ living permanently in me had not yet dawned on me. I was not yet seeking after self-purification and sanctification. This was to come to me when I was moved back into the BMM. At first my days in the hospital were empty and so I sought fulfilment in going out to meet friends in the evening. Even those who were afraid to welcome me in their homes were happy when I showed up in their drinking spots. They paid for my drinks and gave me something for the next day's breakfast. But soon my spirit revolted against this state of affairs. I wanted to be completely free and the thought of escaping did not occur to me. Surely no matter the degree

of integrity of the Cameroon Security, I believe if I wanted to beat them to a thing I could easily do it. They depend more on numbers and brute force. Sometimes I think it was just for this reason that they left me for so long in the hospital. I had become a thorn in their flesh and there was no means of taking me out. They wanted me right out of Cameroon for in the detention centre they found that they were offering me opportunities to extend my popularity in Cameroon. Tanibi had even put the question to me whether I thought the government had brought me there to help me extend my political contacts. But I had no plans to leave Cameroon, for that would have been the only reasonable thing to do if I escaped. I had seen in its various stages the fate of the oppressed Cameroonians and I felt obliged to stay by them. Something was urging me to rededicate myself to the freedom struggle for these people and I could not run away.

There were indeed endeavours to get me set free and it appears that in February, it was agreed that I should be set free in April. Some prisoners were to be released in May and it was hoped I could be listed among them. I do not know what happened but the decision to release me was cancelled. It dawned on me later that my schooling had not finished and so I could not be released. It was the invisible hand of destiny again at work. After 20 May 1973 I became really frustrated and lost my taste for all things around. More and more friends did their best to avoid me. All this while my brother of the same womb, Benedict Nchine Mukong, who was then a representative in the National Assembly, never called to see me at the hospital even though he visited Yaounde twice while I was there. Funnily enough, this did not preserve his name on the list when nominations for the 1973 elections were made. The whole situation became odious to me and I felt an immediate solution must be found.

I had been hoping that Muna could achieve something and the man who was taking care of this for me was my old political associate Mr Martin Luma, then Deputy Minister

of Education. One morning I really got fed up with life. I had waited for so long and Luma never showed up, so I turned up in his office. He told me he could not get much out of old Pa Muna and when I told him I should then have to get at Ayissi Mvodo myself, he agreed with me. I was fed up with the whole set-up, posts without the corresponding authority. No, I could not be such a President of the Assembly. I damned the consequences. It was already getting on for noon when I entered the building housing the Ministry of Territorial Administration. I wanted to see Ayissi Mvodo. I told this to two friends who met me in the corridor. One tried to persuade me to give it up but I brushed passed him. The other simply took to his heels and disappeared.

I went to the office of the Minister and announced to his bodyguard that I wanted to see the Minister. He left immediately to go and announce me without even finding out who I was. The way I spoke was compelling. Halfway there he came back to find out who I was. I told him and hid nothing. He came back shortly afterwards to tell me to wait. I wanted to sit but I could not compose myself and so I kept striding up and down. After some ten minutes I was ushered into the Minister's presence. There were three seats in front of him. Two were already occupied, the centre one empty. This was the one they had reserved for me. To my right I recognised the gendarme who had come from Direction and removed me from Ouandie's cell to cell 9. I knew at once the game was up. But I was not in the least cowed.

I told Ayissi Mvodo I had come to ask for my liberty. For over two years I had been held without knowing why and nobody cared to tell me. He advised me to petition. I told him I had done all that with no result. He still advised me that when I got back to Mantoum I should petition, Here I had to tell him to be reasonable. He signed the papers sending me there and therefore he knew very well why he sent me there.

I was here before him and he was not able to tell me anything but ask me to petition. Apparently that petition had been no use. He shrugged his shoulders and told me there was very little he could do for me. I think I gave him a bit of my opinion of him and the government in which he served and then his thugs led me away. At their offices they promised me hell, but I mocked at them and warned them of very grave consequences if anyone tried any of those methods on me.

By 3 p.m. Muyakana met me at my cell in his premises. He was not angry though. He seemed amused by these new methods. He asked me why I had decided to blow down the Ministry of Territorial Administration. He told me I had indeed shown that I was a very dangerous element to be very closely guarded. Well, he was always available to welcome and lodge people of my type. Here again I was to stay till late in November, before I was transferred back to Mantoum.

The truth is that up to now I had not grasped their philosophy. Fidelity to the regime meant you had to lose your reasoning power. All you had to do was to clap and support. Yes, they demanded unconditional support and that's why all the resolutions in parliament and at party caucuses always expressed a vote of unalloyed and unconditional support. Consequently if you were imprisoned as I was, there was no room for you to seek explanations as to why you had been imprisoned. I had to do a self-examination and end up demanding pardon for any flaws that I might have shown in my loyalty with a promise to be more zealous and loyal in the future. This showed you had been re-educated. If you claimed innocence of the cause of your detention, then in that very breath you had accused the government of injustice and that was subversion pure and simple. I do not think any amount of torture and privation could have brought me round to reason thus, not

even if you were to slaughter my sons before my eyes. No, my spirit never permitted me to admit that black is white, no matter what reward it brought.

There was nothing very exciting in the BMM then. The 'Zaire' case had been completed before I came in. Those concerned had gone through the grill and were there only to tell their story. But not much could be done to them for they were only the collaborators of Ahidjo's son in the trafficking and counterfeiting of the 'Zaire'. Ahidjo's son could not of course be subjected to police interrogations in the BMM. No one even expected him in those cells. All knew that our system of justice respected persons. And indeed the case ended in smoke, being sorted out diplomatically.

There was relative calm in the BMM and so I settled down to a more intensive study of the Bible. It is a wonderful book, the Bible is. You read through and you think you've seen everything, but the next time you are reading through, new wisdom is revealed to you. I had already read it through twice at a slow study pace. Yet one of the verses that completely changed my life was still to be revealed to me. It was at this time that I started my third reading of the Bible and it was at this time that the revelation of John 14 (21-23) dawned on me. After this I thought of the need to sanctify myself unto the Lord and towards this I now turned my efforts. Indeed, I had not before thought holiness was something to be sought after, it was something for monks and nuns. I had not seen it in the priests, though a few had impressed me. And this time they came more and more in my thoughts.

I then started noticing that St Paul in his epistles refers to Christians as saints. Thus we are called to be saints. For too long I had lived under the impression that only in the world to come may we come into that permanent state of grace that leads to purity and holiness. There is a great prize

we gain when we are holy, when we live truly saintly lives. It is in this state of purity that the living Christ and his Father almighty God take up their abode and dwell permanently in you. Thus you become a power house as the omnipotent God dwells in you. What prize could be greater than this? What heights could be greater than this? So, from now on I was resolved to seek after the purity of the saints, to aspire after the holiness of all prod's children, to mount even to the perfection that is divine. It is ten years since I came to this resolve and I think I have gone quite a long way nearer my objectives and I hope one day I shall reach there, when I have no doubt all obstacles, all difficulties, will crumble before me and I may then ride on the crest of glory which our Lord Jesus Christ prepared for himself and for those who love him.

The period of calm we were enjoying in the BMM permitted me to dwell on my reading and writing and develop my thoughts thereon. These included man, what he is and his ultimate end; what is a Christian and Christianity; the fallible/infallible Pope, and some political thoughts. Some of what was started here was later developed in Tchollire.

In the BMM at that time was Takala Celestine, whose death sentence had been commuted to life imprisonment. He had played his cards well to be allowed to serve the time in the BMM at Yaounde. This gave him the opportunity to keep in control of his businesses and so whatever it cost him in cash was worth the spending. There was also Madame Marthe Moumie who was still held in the BMM. She had been brought there about 1968 or so and was still there. After writing the pamphlet, 'Meditating with Mary the Mother of Jesus the Christ', I advised her to try that form of meditation. I gave her a few quotations on which to meditate. She tried it and indeed came the next morning to tell me her experiences. She had made the right spiritual

contact and thereafter spirit bodies taught her the holy scriptures in her sleep.

Many people keep asking me what do I still think of that pamphlet of mine. Most Catholics think that as a member of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star I have denounced its contents. I may take this opportunity to answer them. That work was denounced by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Buea and Bamenda as not being a pious work. This was the conclusion arrived at after a study of it was made by His Lordship Bishop Tumi Christian who was then rector of the senior seminary, Bambui. It was not accepted as a good book for Catholics to read. From it they deduced a different spirit from that which governs the Roman Catholic Church to be working in me and indeed, the various parish priests were warned against me that I was likely to set up a new Church. Unfortunately I was never commissioned from above to set up a new Church, but anyway they were not completely wrong for there is certainly a difference between Roman Catholic Christianity and the Christianity of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star of which I am called to be an apostle. The pamphlet was acclaimed by Leader Olumba Olumba Obu as being of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter Seven

It was sometime in late November that they decided to take me back to Mantoum. The gendarme officer who was to escort me hinted to me an hour or so before we took off. I got my things ready and scribbled a small note to Muna informing him that I was being taken back to Mantoum. It was sad that he could achieve nothing even with his seemingly high position of President of the National Assembly. I had told him he was a disappointment to the Anglophone Cameroonian who had failed to stand up to Ahidjo and would stand condemned before the bar of public opinion. I also informed him that on my arrival at Mantoum I should neither eat nor drink until I was released to return home or until I died and my blood would be upon him. I was hoping to post the letter at Yaounde airport but the surveillance there did not give me a chance. At Douala airport I met a good guy by chance who was happy to do me the service. Instead of accepting money from me for the stamp he gave me something for the way. I thanked God and went.

The next day we got to Mantoum and, faithful to my word in the letter, I went on my hunger strike. That very evening I informed the Commissaire and the Director in writing. I had as usual been taken to the *quartier spécial*. The next day the Director came and asked me to be removed to the ordinary rooms. I continued my fast. Although to the authorities I had declared a hunger strike before my God I was fasting. Yet truly at the bottom of my heart I was hoping that death would ensue. I had not before done more than three day's dry fasting, and I believed that if I continued up

to seven days I should surely die, considering the very poor conditions under which I had been living. Tanibi really got his spies around me to make sure that I did not cheat him by eating and giving the impression that I was not eating. On the third day both the Commissaire and the Director visited me in the room where I lived. I spent all my time there and in the evening when the sun went down I would take a walk round the yard. They were shocked to find me still resolved on my venture.

The Commissaire tried to advise me to eat and hoped that eventually all will be well with me. I told him I was tired of being ruled by criminals and terrorists. The world was not a good place to live in if everyone lived in fear. Tanibi tried to tell me he was not living in fear. I told him Ahidjo himself was the most terror-stricken of all and the prison was but testimony of his reaction to that state. How much more frightened was a small Director of the Centre? At that he walked out.

The next day I received the visit of the gendarmerie captain of the Research Brigade in Bafoussam. He told me the governor of the Western Province had sent him to come and listen to my complaints. Perhaps I was not properly fed. He had some money to give me there and then and he would report to the governor who would make adequate arrangements thereafter. I thanked him and the governor for their concern but told him that I wanted my liberty and nothing else. Either they released me and I went home or my spirit would be released in death. It was not for such a regime that I had urged my people to vote and if this was unification then I had all cause to regret and blame myself for being one of the strongest advocates of it and even the greatest of its architects. I could no longer live in a fear-torn society. Everyone was afraid from top to bottom and fear was no good as a cementing cord for a nation. He told me he was not afraid. I told him he was lying. If majors and colonels were afraid, how could a small captain say he was

not afraid? I was fed up with their criminal Head of State, Ahidjo, who himself lived in fear and now it seemed there was no basis for understanding between us. He warned me that he would report as best he could all that I said to the Head of State. I told him I did not hold the same fear he held for that man. At that he could not continue. Perhaps if he had continued to listen to that talk it might constitute subversion against him. He walked off in apparent anger and so did the Commissaire and the Director who had come with him.

Perhaps because the air in Mantoum is very dry and also the time of the year was most and, the fast was very severe on me. It was with much difficulty that I went through the fourth day although when I was talking to this captain I seemed to have gained much power. Anyway I was lying all the time I was addressing myself to him. And I think he went away confident that I must need death soon, perhaps the next day even.

The next day I felt as though I had internal wounds in my throat and indeed I spat out blood when I went to brush my teeth. I believed the end was near and I was comforted. Then I thought of my children and shuddered at leaving them so young and without my blessing. The idea came to me that I could summon their spirits to my bedside and bless them. So I rose up, and sat on my bed, then went into meditation and summoned these spirits. I stayed in the silence until I could feel spiritual presences. I then opened my mouth in prayer for them and called upon them God's blessing. When I lifted up my hands to bless them, more blessings poured out of my lips and then tears came to my eyes. I could feel the children there and I knew they were there. I felt their spirits tormented instead of being calmed by my blessings and it appeared all four spirits poured out bitter tears. It was quite a spectacle to the prisoners. They ran and called the agents of the Director to witness the scene. Even the Chef de Poste came. It appeared the whole

camp was stirred and agitated. But I went on calmly with my children in spirit. We seemed to have been in that state for a quarter of an hour. Then things subsided. I wiped my tears and turned round to take note of the crowd that had gathered round. I went quietly to my bed and slept.

I was hardly asleep for one hour when I was awakened and told to get ready to go to Foumban to meet the Prefect. I had no preparations to make but followed the guard at once and we boarded a vehicle for Foumban. It was about 3 p.m. that I was introduced into the office of the prefect, Mr Nisack. He received me in his office and told me he had had a full report of all that was going on and had asked the Director to bring me so that he could make some better arrangements about my stay. If it was because of the poor diet he was prepared to improve my meals. Special conditions could be made to govern my stay. I shook my head and told him I had had more than enough of the criminal regime and preferred to die rather than to live and see crime all around. In the hope of inducing me to accept better material conditions he tried but failed, and I was taken back to Mantoum.

There was a special force that came to my aid each time I was before these authorities, for indeed I was weak from fasting. Sometimes when I swallowed spittle it went down tasting as though it was mingled with blood. Again it appears that the spiritual reunion with my children, instead of strengthening me in my cause, weakened me. I felt a need not to end it so quickly and again I thought the authorities were taking it seriously counting from the visit of the gendarme captain and the visit to the Prefect. Perhaps if I stretched it a bit longer something would be done. It might help a bit if I drank a glass of water a day. And so that evening when I was washing my mouth I drank a cup of water. Thus ended day five. I then decided to prolong the fast by drinking a cup of water a day thereafter.

That night my mind roamed about quite a bit and soon my spirit started judging me. Did I think that this was the sacrifice God expected from me? Was it only for this purpose that he had preserved my life all these years? Did I not think the authorities would be much happier to have me buried and be done with? Surely there was something special which my God had created me for. No one had ever spoken to these torturers the way I did and got away with it. I had never been initiated into any secret society and had all my hope in God only. Yet these men showed a trepid fear of me. They could have already killed me and thrown me away. From what I saw in Yaounde there would be no one to raise a voice. Indeed many of the friends who came to see me told me they had long believed me dead. But why did they not kill me? The answer was obvious, God preserved my life and surely it was not in vain that he thus preserved my life against all attempts to destroy it. No, I had to wait and see the realisation of the objectives for which God had created me. And in these years he had in dreams revealed much to me. Surely I must one day get to where he had revealed to me I would.

All the same I continued this fast the sixth, the seventh, and the eighth day with only this reduction in its intensity in that I drank a cup of water every day. I got weaker and weaker but I had not shaken off life yet. In the evenings, when I came out of my room to walk round the yard as was my habit, a sort of dead silence fell on my fellow detainees. They watched me in awe and respect. I remember one evening, Rebecca came up to me as I walked round and advised me to stop it and eat. She assured me that I could never be released because of the hunger strike. Then she told me she knew it was for all the prisoners and she was sure that they would benefit but not me. I told her that even that was good.

On the ninth day I rose up to pray around 3 p.m. There and then, as though dictated to by someone, I decided to end the fast. By this time our feeding group had been disorganised. Christophe and Lingo were in the *quartier* and I was out, so some UPC militants from the Bassa tribe were cooking for me. After my prayer I told the head of the group that I would eat. He was very happy and announced the news around. Almost everybody made a contribution for my food that evening, but I could not drink more than the brew which had been made from the sifted particles of ground corn. For the next week several people sent contributions of fish, meat, rice, yams, etc. to augment my food. It was already December, and the year was drawing to a close. As usual we looked forward to the release of some prisoners. This expectation sustained by the numerous dreams which were related every day kept up our spirits till Christmas came and passed with its normal celebrations.

Tanibi's attitude towards me changed greatly after this fast. He treated me with some awe. Indeed he preferred not to have occasion to meet me. I also welcomed this attitude and kept my distance. For my *corvée* I was attached to the Commissaire's office. Then the Commissaire told me it was just a measure to exclude me from *corvée* and the cell supplementaries. Once more I had a period of calm and fortunately too there was not much agitation on the part of the agents of the Director. Everyone was hoping for release. I knew it would not affect me and so I prayed that Effa might go away. His continued stay might drag me into wrangles with Tanibi. Tips from the offices of both Director and Commissaire assured us there would be a release and so hope again filled the camp. Many were disappointed when Christmas arrived and there "was yet no release. Then New Year came and there had been none. But that new year the Director amnestied all those in the *quartier spécial* and they returned to the main camp.

It was, I think in the second week of January 1974 that it happened. The prisoners had gone out to work when all of a sudden they saw empty trucks arriving in the compound. The first passed, then the second, then the third and so on up to six in all, and they carried only gendarmes, about four in each truck. Soon the word went round as the old *assignés* announced that it was the day of release. The vehicles converged on the Director's compound. Soon the Commissaire was called in for a working session with the Director. It appears there were a few optional places for them to decide on which prisoner to go home. That was the version of the *assignés*. In general the list of those to be released always came from Yaounde with an *arrêté* for each prisoner. After some time the authorities came down into the camp. The bell was rung and all the *assignés* were assembled. The names of those who were to return home were read and the rest of us were bundled into the assembly hall (the dining hall) and guarded until the freed ones had left the compound. Rebecca was released and Effa too. I was indeed consoled.

Soon rumours of the possible closure of the centre started reaching us. This raised spirits quite highly as even the Commissaire appeared to encourage the rumours. Tanibi, on the contrary, was very angry at those rumours and took measures to stop them by casting many into the punishment cell. He even re-opened the *quartier*. And so the days rolled on. Soon we were in February, then we came to the days of March. It was still early March when I was collected by the Director and taken up to Foumban. I was told to take some covering for the night. No rumour had reached us about this and so we could not guess why. At Foumban, I was taken to the *Commissariat Spécial*. There I was handed over to someone for an *enquête*. It turned out this man was the Chief of the BMM in Bafoussam.

This was the consequence of the letter I had addressed to Muna on my way from Yaounde back to Mantoum. The President of the National Assembly did indeed receive this letter and handed it over to the DIREDOC so that they could find out if it came from me and if so why I called him a disappointment. The BMM' Chief received me in their traditional rude way. He did not even offer me a seat though there were two chairs standing by me opposite him. As I came in he brought out a photocopy of that letter and, shouting very rudely, wanted to know whether I recognised it. I saw my signature and knew it was mine.

I received the letter from his hand and glanced through it and immediately recalled this letter written four or five months back. I nodded my head in recognition and told him, yes, I knew of the letter. In a very rude and haughty tone he again asked me whether I was admitting having written such a letter to the President of the National Assembly. I noticed at once that he was intending to put into me. In their view, I should try to deny it and blame it on tricks carried out by enemies on me-. It was now my turn and I looked sternly into his face, then I told him that I had written the letter myself and with emphasis added that I was in my normal senses when I wrote it.

This admission seemed to embarrass the man and he calmed down and then offered me a chair. I sat down. Then he drew out papers from his suitcase and started work. After inserting what information the formalities required, he turned towards me and asked what I meant by calling the President of the National Assembly a disappointment. I opened up by declaring that Ahidjo was the disappointment who had betrayed the Cameroonian Reunification. Not finding Foncha a very willing tool to be used in this work, and finding Jua a definite obstacle to his cause, he had sought and obtained the willingness of others whom he used to replace these two. Using others as the spokesman of

Anglophone Cameroon, Ahidjo had betrayed the cause of Cameroon Unification in general, and the Anglophone Cameroonian in particular.

I started with an exposition of Ahidjo's treachery, from an analysis of the United Nations work during the February/March special session on Cameroon in 1959, to the plebiscite, the constitutional conference at Foumban and the events thereafter. I pointed out the special treachery towards the Anglophone Cameroonian in the fact that both Ahidjo and Foncha signed a joint *communiqué* to the effect that the re-unified Cameroon would be neither in the Commonwealth nor in the French community. This was published and circulated by the United Nations team that supervised the plebiscite. Yet a few months after Unification we found ourselves a *de facto* part of the French community. Indeed the aim of my statement was to show the overall treachery carried out by the regime to the Cameroonian cause, presenting Anglophone politicians as the only willing tool in Ahidjo's hands. It declared Anglophone politicians mere boot-lickers to Ahidjo without a say in the country's affairs. It went into much detail mentioning names of army officers, members of the security forces and even civil servants.

This Commissaire spent that whole morning and afternoon taking down my declarations, asking questions and writing. By 5 p.m. he had finished then he went to another office, where as he told me himself, he had to inform Yaounde of my declarations so as to get their instructions on how to continue. He telephoned the whole thing to Yaounde and was told to have it typed so that I might sign it. He came back and told me so. I was taken to the hospital where I spent the night with the other *assignés*.

In the morning I went back to him. The Commissaire did the typing himself. The subversion in the declarations was too severe for another officer to come in contact with

it. By noon he finished the typing and made me sign the copies. Every sheet had to be signed: there were seven in all and five copies of each so the signing was quite a job. When I finished signing he told me he had finished with me and so I could go.

I was quite disappointed. I reminded him that my fingerprints were not yet on the document. He was surprised that I wanted my fingerprints on the document. Then I asked him the purpose of all this *enquête*. Was it not for the Military Tribunal? It was now his turn to have a good laugh. Was that my idea of the Military Tribunal, a platform for me to launch my attack on the government? Was that why I went to all that detail in my declaration? So I wanted to be given a public platform for my political campaigns? He then assured me that if I were mad they were not mad and knew how to protect their interests. Government would surely take note of my declarations but the highest publicity they would receive would be to find a place in top secret files. We parted in friendship and mutual respect.

That evening I was taken back to Mantoum. As soon as I got there I was taken to the Director who told me to prepare for my departure the next day. I should collect all my property for I was being taken to Yaounde and there was no likelihood of my coming back there.

This caused much misgiving to the other *assignés*. They did not like my departure under such conditions. Perhaps these criminals had finally decided to carry out their normal act of elimination. It would not be the first, nor even the hundredth. And I had revealed to them the substance of the *enquête*. Tanibi was very happy that I was going away and those who had been there six years and more believed this joy was because the government had decided to kill me clandestinely and be done with me.

Such things had been very frequent; a prisoner taken out under similar conditions, taken into the bush and shot from the rear. Then a report would be fabricated of how this was an error which occurred as they were pursuing the fleeing prisoner. And sometimes if you were not a well-known character, you were shot and abandoned in the bush and that ended it.

I was not in the least frightened. Rather I thought the people might have decided to give me up as a bad case, one that could not be re-educated. That very evening my friend Otto got the truth. I was bound for Tchollire. But I did not like this side of it. Rather I nourished the pet idea of a possible release. In the morning the gendarme in Mantoum escorted me up to Foumban. He was to go with me as far as Bafoussam. At Foumban he took me again to the Prefect.

Chapter Eight

Mr Nisack was quite pleasant when he received me. He first reminded me that I was married and had children and as such owed a responsibility towards those children. He was going to put a proposal to me and I ought to consider it, taking into consideration this responsibility. He told me that many Cameroonians had ideas very similar to mine but better reason had shown that they do things contrary to their beliefs for this very reason that they had families to support. The regime that was on had very deep roots and there was no likelihood of its ever being overthrown. It was therefore advisable for me to conform and save myself all this suffering. He advised me very strongly to declare for the CNU and he would have a better story to tell me.

I told him that my arrest had been very unfortunate. When the CNU was founded in 1966 I joined from the word go. I worked very hard in it but soon discovered that it had no room for public opinion, even resolutions of the section, the highest organ in which I participated were not worth the paper on which they were written. After this realisation I simply dropped out from participating in party activities without announcing that I had resigned. With what I had discovered in detention, I was obliged to be openly opposed to the CNU.

The Prefect informed me that he was motivated by the considerations of the role I had played in Cameroon politics to try to persuade me to come to a decision that would benefit me and my family and even some of my old party friends. He then told me outright that he was standing in

for the Head of State, who had empowered him to discuss this thing with me. If I were ready to join the CNU, the Head of State was ready to give me a political appointment. He would like to use me politically to promote the cause of peace and unity. I smiled and told the Prefect that I was sorry the government never thought of my children when arresting me. I then informed him my wife was now living with another man. One of those things I held very precious in my life, the sanctity of the family bond, had been destroyed. The CNU was a criminal organisation short and simple and I could never collaborate with it. That was final. It were better I was quickly led to me grave.

‘No, no,’ he assured me; ‘no one would tamper with your life.’ But since I had refused to listen to his advice he was sorry for what still lay ahead of me. Anyway I should proceed and perhaps at Yaounde I might come to better reasoning. I thanked him for his concern and took leave of him.

Many friends and well-wishers have often blamed me for refusing offers of appointment made by the Ahidjo government. When I recount an incident like this memories of these accusations come to mind for when they will read this they will say I hid the truth from them. I have indicated here that I refused a political appointment involving support for the CNU and the Ahidjo policies. This is a conscience job and my conscience said no. Again this was put to me at Tchollire when I had to distinguish between serving Cameroon as a civil servant or in a parastatal corporation or in the National Assembly. I was working for Powercam, a parastatal corporation before my arrest. That was serving Cameroon and involving no politics. I was never called upon in the execution of my duties to sing Ahidjo’s praises. I was not bound even to attend CNU meetings.

Apparently even the creator had placed a bar between me and this man. I remember he himself had invited me to meet him in Yaounde when we met in private session at

Foumban in 1961 during the constitutional talks. Then I refused to go because we saw him as a slave, a complete stooge of the French. With the passage of time Ahidjo became a master of himself, only he allied with the French for support. His second person became more distasteful to me than the first. I am sorry I may hurt the feelings of some of those whom I respect but by this let them know they lost my respect when they could no longer see that Ahidjo was a man to be treated with contempt. These chaps treated him, and perhaps still hold him, in respect. And they would want us to consider them as serious Christians, endeavouring to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. They treat with spite the poor and downtrodden like us but honour Ahidjo.

What does the book of God say? Psalm 15, verse 4, says; 'He who shall sojourn in the tent of the Lord, who shall dwell on his holy hill is one in whose eyes a reprobate is despised, but who honours those who fear the Lord.'

Did Ahidjo fear the Lord? Far from it, rather he made himself a god who was worshipped by more than ninety per cent of his close collaborators. He arrogated to himself honour and praise which were only due to God. The press today openly admit this. No one was more of a reprobate than Ahidjo. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines a reprobate as: a person cast off by God, hardened in sin, of abandoned character, immoral.

Ahidjo was cast off by God even when he was in his mother's womb, for he was conceived a bastard and the book of God (Deuteronomy 23, verse 2) says, 'No bastard shall enter the assembly of the Lord, even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord.' The greatest error Cameroonians ever made was in allowing one under such a curse to reign over them. However, the Lord, who is always faithful to himself, later cast him off in name and the worst has not yet come, but it will surely come.

Who was more hardened in sin than Ahidjo? In Ahidjo's concept of justice he established the torture centres here described, built prisons for his personal prisoners, rendered children fatherless and left thousands of women widows. It is pitiable to see how even religious leaders sought favour from this reprobate, hobnobbed with him and worshipped him rather than honouring God.

Let's go back to our story. My gendarme escort took me to Bafoussam, whence I was the next day relayed to Yaounde where I spent four days in the Brigade Routiere.

An incident occurred to me at this brigade which has afflicted my heart quite a lot ever since. The very day I arrived I met someone who knew me and also knew a friend of mine who lived very near the brigade. He was a Director in his Ministry and I think he is still a Director today. This person who knew me immediately carried the story of my arrival in that brigade to this Director's wife. He was in the office. In less than two hours she had prepared a really good dish and sent to me. I ate it with relish and my heart rejoiced for my pains were soothed. She assured me of my meals as long as I was there. But this was to be the last meal. When the husband came back he was furious with his wife for thus compromising his position. This is but one of such acts that I suffered at the hands of the very people for whom I was suffering. If I had accepted a political appointment from Ahidjo and joined the bandwagon of his alleluia-singers, that would have very much improved my personal material position but the torture of Cameroonians, the oppression, the exploitation would have continued.

Even those who would like us to take them as lovers of freedom and democracy, those who stand for the oppressed, those who would serve in Christ's Ministry of Justice, did not see that this was an effective way of fighting against this regime. This was an effective passive resistance struggle. And it surely had its results though waged by a

single soul. All the same it was not me that did it but my Lord who had chosen me as a vessel for this work.

I narrate this incident because it hurt me, it hurt my love, it was like that sword thrust into the side of our Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross. May the Lord forgive.

On the fifth day after my arrival at this brigade I was escorted up north. It was my first time of going north and I went in chains. We boarded the plane in Yaounde and it took just about an hour before we landed at Garoua airport. It was horrible outside when we came out of the air-conditioned plane. The heat was oppressive and seemed to be sparsely supplied with oxygen for breathing was difficult. The climate was hostile though I had had a taste of such a climate in Sokoto in Nigeria, Niamey in the Niger Republic and Goa in the Mali Republic. I had only visited these places and put in a few days in each. But now I had come to make my home in this hostile climate under these hostile conditions. I had no choice and I had to bear this cross. If it was truly the Cross of Christ it would not crush me. I was at the police post of Garoua for two days and on the third day I was escorted to my real destination Tchollire.

The north is a fairly level land and at this time there are no rains at all. We came back towards Ngaoundere, and I think the turn left is about 120 kilometres from Garoua. From this point you do about a hundred or more kilometres before you get to the Tchollire town. This is where the sub-prefecture was then. I think it has now been raised to a full prefecture. From here I think the prison is well over 30 kilometres away.

Tchollire is a vast territory but sparsely populated. The prison is situated in the wasteland far away from all settlements. It is a settlement apart, a forbidden land to those around and it is situated in a game reserve area so that wild beasts roam all around. Yes, here lions, leopards, tigers, abound, and will easily prey on a lonely wayfarer, even on

two or three as long as they are unarmed. This is one of those factors that ensures that each prisoner stays put and never thinks of escaping from prison.

The prison is situated between two rivers that almost surround it and thus give the impression of an island. An electrified fence surrounds the camp. I remember one of the prisoners was electrocuted at this fence while I was there. He was a young man from Bagangte. We were out working early in the morning when the current was not yet switched off. He was cleaning very near the fence and unfortunately he lifted his cutlass and hit a live wire. It was automatic and he lay there dead. There were at first some rumours that his people would be contacted so that the corpse is sent back to them, but that afternoon we buried him in the bush of Tchollire. I think there were two or three other graves of some other prisoners there. In general the authorities arrange to ensure that no deaths occur in the place. When they notice a prisoner has but a few days more to live he is rushed to hospital. Here in Tchollire it would be Garoua hospital.

But sometimes they miscalculate. I remember the case of another prisoner who died while I was there. He was sick and the nurse in charge asked for his evacuation to Garoua, but the Chief of the centre did not think it so urgent. One evening they just noticed at about 8 p.m. that he was almost gone. A vehicle was immediately brought to take him to Garoua. They had not gone eight kilometres before he died. He was wrapped in his mat and buried in the bush there.

We had not even entered the compound but were taken off at a tangent at the fact that the camp was surrounded by an electrified fence. As usual there is a big metal gate that opens into it. The camp is about one hundred and fifty metres square. There is one building each at the east end, north end and south end. It is again by the west end that you enter. Just by the entrance there is a small block building in which there was the guard and a small dark disciplinary

cell. Next to this, and about thirty metres away, there is a building in which there is the clinic as well as the food store. Next to these are two blocks used as kitchens. When I arrived at Tchollire, Bishop Ndongmo was occupying the South block alone. One would think it was an honour but this is far from it.

He was marooned. No prisoner was allowed to talk to him except the one that was assigned to attend to his needs, wash his clothes, clean his room and wash his plates. His food was prepared by the wife of the Director of the centre. This woman could not understand a word of French, though she managed some pidgin English. The Director himself was an Alhaji who never knew how to read and write, a retired gendarme who had almost got to the rank of sub-lieutenant.

Bishop Ndongmo was living all alone in this house with capacity for over fifty prisoners only because part of his punishment was that he had no one to talk to. I think we were more than fifty in each of the other blocks because there were about one hundred and forty of us there then. I was again in the north end block. There were very few women. I remember two but surely there were never more than four. One was a Jehovah's Witness, Deborah was her name, I think, and she came from Edea. There were quite a number of Jehovah's Witnesses there. The other woman came from Bagangte. She went out of her senses and became my personal charge. I remember another prisoner, too, who really went crazy, and again I had to attend to him. This one was really wild and violent towards everybody but he was never wild to me, and so I could take him his food and perhaps put him under control for some thirty minutes. Paul Ndongmo was his name and he came from Dschang too. He was a really good mason, who later worked here in Limbe at the construction of SONARA. He, as well as the Bagangte woman, was there for the rebellion.

I saw no real politicians here except for two or three Democrats of Mbida's party who later joined us from Mokolo. But later on another came who became really close to me and played a significant part in my life. That was Mouhamadou Fokou. He had had quite a turbulent political past. Yet another prisoner turned up much later and he also became very intimate with me. This was the Rev. Patrice Nuka, a Roman Catholic priest from Bafia.

The rest of the prisoners were farmers, traders and low-grade employees. But there was one senior servant who later arrived from Yaounde – Balk was his name. He continued to receive his salary until I left him there. I later met him in his Ministry in Yaounde – the Ministry of Economy and Planning it was then. Some big shots later joined us from Ngaoundere.

The Alhaji who was the Director of the Centre behaved more or less like a lamido; after all he had more powers over us than a lamido had over his subjects. He rarely came into the prison yard. The quarters of the staff – Director, Commissaire and guards – were much further away than in Mantoum. They lived about four hundred metres away. The guards were recruited locally from among the slaves of the great Rey Bouba. His palace was less than fifteen kilometres from our camp. There was the traditional friction between Commissaire and Director but here it was mild. In the first place the Director was an elderly man and the Commissaire was still young, most likely under thirty years of age then. Again, the authority of the Director was unanimously accepted by all the guards and the gendarmes who used to come for periods of three months in rotation. These were the ones really responsible for guarding us. Further it must be admitted that the Alhaji Director was more benevolent than Tanibi. He and the Commissaire did not seem very interested in having agents among the prisoners as informers. Consequently the compound had more calm and we enjoyed some sort of peace of mind.

Here too we were locked up at 10 p.m. and opened at 5 a.m. The *corvée* started at 7 a.m. The work was almost the same as in Mantoum but the farm work was not as severe. Prisoners did not go far here on *corvée* and there was absolutely no contact with people who did not belong to this world of ours. By 2 p.m. everybody was back from *corvée*.

Our diet in Tchollire consisted principally of guinea corn flour. Each prisoner had a cup of the flour each day. This cup had a cubical content of about a litre. Sometimes we had rice. We cultivated sweet potatoes and cassava and some of this was served us. The other things were irregular such as palm oil or diamar oil, groundnuts, meat, salt, etc. Sometimes these things were served us in good quantities continuously for three months, then another three months might pass by with nothing of the sort. As we lived in a game reserve there were many wild animals in the surrounding bush. Even in the streams around there were hippopotamuses. These indeed were more often hunted for us. One hippopotamus could supply each prisoner with some four kilos of meat and there would still be enough for the guards and others. Leopards, bush pigs and buffaloes were sometimes hunted for us. In those seasons we could get as much as four kilos of meat each month. These we dried and preserved against the months ahead. It was too at such times that we received groundnuts and diamar oil. When the period of neglect came it was complete and as though it did not arise from scarcity but as a normal part of our syllabus in civic education.

There was quite a lot of land in the interior of the camp which was free. This we divided up among ourselves in little parcels and there we did our gardening. We produced lots of tomatoes, lettuce, quite a lot of pawpaw, pepper, garden eggs and pumpkins. These we sold to the guards and gendarmes. Madam – the Director's wife bought most of the tomatoes which she sent to the town to be sold at better prices.

It was by this gardening that I maintained myself there. I had a piece of land about five metres square. At the peak of the harvest I got a bucket of tomatoes from there every two days. This we sold for two hundred francs a bucket and this was quite adequate to supplement the ration. Later I also acquired three pepper plants. During the farming season, we could also farm for our personal benefit small parcels of land near the camp. There I also farmed some corn and groundnuts. I remember when I was discharged in 1976 I left some groundnuts still unharvested in my farm, which I passed over to my friend the priest.

Bishop Ndongmo became our local gardening expert. He had a garden himself and he personally supervised its cultivation. His attendant, Andre Ngouloumdar, a young man from Tokombere in the far north, made the beds. This Bishop seized the opportunity offered by the gardening to meet with us and discuss. Many a time he came over to my garden as though to advise on this or that and then we would examine one or two points. At such times too I would also pass on to him the many rumours which the prisoners fabricated. These inevitably ended up as an indication of a release that was soon to be effected.

It is wonderful, the liberty of the individual! When you lose it you are no longer a complete human. God created man in his own image and likeness. In order to be this you must be free. That's why he leaves us free to choose to serve him or not. Yet he has all necessary instruments of coercion sickness, loss of property, loss of business, loss of loved ones and even loss of our own lives. Yet he refrains from using these against the wicked. Indeed, we often find in practice here on earth that the wicked prosper more than those who seek the righteousness of God. It seems God has given over those who seek after his righteousness into the hands of those who are wicked. That is why it is commonly held that God created the world but Satan rules

over it. What I am trying to say here is that it is a very grievous offence against nature for someone to impinge on the liberty of another. Let each one through his own act lose the right to his liberty and this only for the time prescribed by law and duly pronounced by a legally constituted court of justice. Then his blood is upon him, as the Bible says. But when someone has not stolen, nor killed, and yet for the lust of power, he is committed to imprisonment, surely his blood shall be on those who imprisoned him. Many fail to see that those of us who passed through the grill of the BMM, and were imprisoned in the concentration camps, did shed our life blood so that they might have the peace that was so much talked of in Cameroon.

I estimated, and my estimates may even run short, that from 1958 up to 1982 when Ahidjo resigned from the presidency, he had caused the deaths of no less than twenty-five thousand people in the bloody struggle in the *maquis*, another five thousand by the tortures in the BMM and yet another twenty thousand shed their blood by passing through the detention camps. Those oppressed had no chance of retaliation.

I spoke of how we loved to hear rumours of a possible release. These rumours were created by us and without any basis and then we worked ourselves up into believing that there was something in the offing which would culminate in releases about such or such a date. In general we believed that we could be released any day but the most favoured dates around which we conjectured were: 1 January (Independence of Cameroon Republic); 1 October (Re-unification day); 20 May (the so-called Peaceful Revolution); 18 February (Ahidjo took over from Mbida as Prime Minister); 1 September (CNU was founded). We had no access to any information. The gendarmes who kept guard at our entrance gate had small radios on which they used to

listen to music and broadcasts in Fulfulde. When it was time for news they switched off lest a prisoner might get some information. The letters that came in were censored and they had to contain only news about the family. If a letter dared to conjecture that the family was hoping that the President would make a favourable gesture this coming feast such a letter was not delivered. It was regarded as treating political issues.

This more than encouraged rumour-mongering. A prisoner who went to work in the Director's house could fabricate anything and tell us he got it from Madam's lips. We had no means of cross-checking and there was no better authentic source of information. Surely Madam must have got it from the Director! This was gospel truth and if you tried to doubt this information you became an enemy of the other prisoners. You did not believe it because you did not want to be released.

But the others did want to be released and your attitude would be considered as working against their impending release. This will amuse the reader but it is true and that's how we were reduced to reasoning. We loved to listen to dreams and particularly those created by the strong existing thought-waves in the camp about an impending release. There was no reason why this dream should not come true. And you dared not reason that we could be dreaming of something that might take place in two years. You were then an enemy to the prisoners. Funnily enough, it is true that no new prisoner came without our having been forewarned in dream. This only would confirm the belief that the dream about the release must be true.

There is something I noticed about dreams then. When you dreamt of something evil, be sure it was in the immediate future, but when you dreamt of something good it might take quite some time before it was realised. When we dreamt of the arrival of other prisoners, they would

surely arrive within a week. If we dreamt of being beaten or thrown into the disciplinary cell it would take place that very day or at the most the next day. When we used this yardstick to determine the time of realisation of a dream about the impending release of prisoners, it almost inevitably failed. Our superstition had no limits. We watched the birds that flew over our camp, how many and in what direction. If they came from West to East this indicated the arrival of new prisoners but if in the opposite direction then they indicated the impending release of a similar number of prisoners. Even though this was obviously ridiculous, you dared not say so. You could disagree with a dream or a totem that showed the arrival of new prisoners. No one was particularly interested in these new arrivals. They only shortened our ration.

None the less, these prognostics played a useful part in our lives. They helped us to reduce the long weary years of uncertainty into short periods of hope. A normal forecast gave the longest period of three months. When we were apparently agreed on this date all other dreams and omens only came to confirm it, until it came and passed. We looked forward to this date with hope and expectation. It came as usual and passed without event. Our spirits were low for a few days, yet within those few days another dream or rumour would reveal the more authentic date. Again we worked ourselves up to accepting this as true, and new life came back to us.

So we reduced the unknown years into short periods of hope. This helped to maintain our sanity. I noticed both in Mantoum and Tchollire that those who completely rejected these prognostications often went crackers.

Chapter Nine

When I got to Tchollire, it dawned on me clearly that the Ahidjo government was serious and would never release me unless I embraced the CNU. And my spirit revolted each time someone mentioned that name near me. The stay I had had in the hospital at Yaounde had further exposed the wickedness of the regime to me. Before coming to the hospital I had sometimes entertained the belief that Ahidjo was not well informed on my case. But at the hospital a top security man had told me that daily reports, were being made about me to Ahidjo, and I met many other people who gave me an insight into the working of the government. With this I resolved to die rather than bow to Ahidjo. I thus became more hostile to the regime. No doubt my stand was strengthened by what the spirit has also revealed to me. There was a certain ameliorating factor here in Tchollire. The centre was run by northerners who had confidence in themselves and were sure the regime belonged to them so they were fairly natural in their relationship with the prisoners. This self-confidence did not allow them go to the excessive lengths southerners did in order to impress Ahidjo.

In the Republic then one could easily distinguish three classes of citizenship. There was the northerner who was a citizen of exceptional class (*citoyen haute classe*) then the Francophone who was a first class citizen and the Anglophone who was a second class citizen. Today the *haute classe* and the *premiere class* seem to be fusing into one or changing places but the Anglophone remains in his place. The *haute classe* citizens knew that the regime was theirs, the

CNU was their party, they indeed owned it and tolerated the few southerners that were numbered in the leadership of the CNU. The Anglophone knew and accepted his place as coming last in the Republic. As such he carried on his duties as carefully as he could, leaving all decisions to be made by his overlord – the Francophone Cameroonian. To the Anglophone, whether the Francophone was northerner or southerner made very little difference, they were his overlords. He had been annexed and had only to accept this lot.

Even if the Francophone was a junior officer, you did not treat him without his background knowledge; for if he reported back to Yaounde, you might lose your place. The Anglophone who wanted to rise had to stooge before his French-speaking overlord, be he northerner or southerner. To show greater zeal he refused to give the Anglophone his rights and benefits but granted all the privileges to the Francophone. The Anglophone seeker of the post as well as the average Francophone southerner had to show extra zeal and admiration of all that was of northern origin – dress and religion being very distinctive. They sought marriages with northern wives and forced their daughters to marry northern overlords. A southerner placed in a position like Tanibi's or Muyakana'a had to make life doubly bitter to his brothers so as to show his loyalty to Ahidjo. That situation is today only affected insofar as the northerner has lost his claim to *citoyen haute classe*. That is why unity is still on lips and has not descended to the hearts.

Yes, the fact that we had northerners running Tchollire made it more tolerable. And though this is the only place where I was twice very severely beaten, I still declare that my two and half years there were the most peaceful and calm. Indeed they had to beat me so as to understand me. Once I was understood they left me alone and even made effective reports to Yaounde which ended in my release. Ahidjo had lost all respect in my eyes and so did his director of torture Forchive. I did not want to hear those two names

mentioned near me. And I told each prisoner just what I thought about them when they came talking to me about these fellows.

I do not think it was with vicious intent that the Commissaire got to know about this. I think the prisoner might have just been loose-tongued when he informed the Commissaire about this attitude of mine. The Commissaire came to me and while we were talking he tried to paint a good picture of Ahidjo. No, my ears just could not bear that and I told him what a traitor Ahidjo was and even went on to tell him that it was impossible that Ahidjo should end up peacefully. He too must come to take his turn in these prisons and torture centres he had created. Surely this Commissaire must have expected this for he did not flare up as he did on other issues. He continued the discussion calmly and led on to Forchive. I told him that Forchive was criminal number two in the Republic and it would be difficult for him not to suffer the same fate as Ahidjo. Forchive was a director of torture and nothing else. He told me I should understand that Forchive was his hierarchic boss. I retorted that that fact did not change the nature of the duty Forchive and himself were now involved in doing. He was hurt and went away.

The next day I was sleeping in my bed at about 10 a.m. when a list of names was brought into the yard and read out. Mine was there and we were asked to move to the guard post at the gate. We did and there we were all accused of committing what crime I cannot now recall and for our punishment we were to be beaten. Since my visits to the BMM, this was the first time I was to receive the chapel type of beating.

The first person went to receive his strokes. He was asked to lie down and he did. Then a cattle herd in the name of a guard was called to inflict the punishment. For a cane he had the type of whip horse riders in the north use. The first stroke went and this stout man sprang like a cat, wriggling and begging.

I looked again and asked myself whether I would also be reduced to this state. The inner man in me said no. I started a simple exercise in metaphysics. I went on with it, repeating to myself, 'There is nothing like pain. Pain is all imaginary.' I went on with its repetition until it came to my turn. I lay down calmly and looked away from the cane. He landed the first, second, third, and I did not show any signs of pain. He stopped and looked at me. I looked unconcerned. The Commissaire was furious and asked him to continue.

He put in greater effort and took off the shirt from my back. Here he was able to make the blood flow and thus convince the Commissaire he did his job with all zeal. I did not even shake till he finished. The Commissaire asked me to get up. When I stood up I asked him whether that was all he could do. At this he was angered and ordered me down again. I calmly went down for a repeat of the exercise. When they finished I again asked the Commissaire if that was all he could do. This time he thought his hands could do better. He landed a blow on my jaw and as he was coming with the second I thought I should give him one too.

Fortunately for me as his blow landed on my left arm which I had brought forward as a shield, he reeled off and fell down. I thanked God that I had not added the blow, I might have had to stand trial for murder. Fear had seized him and he got up quietly, cleaned his clothes and went off without waiting to see the beatings of the others through to the end. I went to the Clinic where I was treated and I had to keep my bed for three days. The Commissaire after this became fairly friendly with me.

The Director of the Centre called me up to his house a week later and told me he had heard that the Commissaire had beaten me and that I even lay sick in bed. He was surprised that these young men should be so rash in their decisions. Anyway, he assured me, he had already warned him against touching me in the future. But I knew that the

Commissaire had not done it without prior consultation with him. Now I had taken a decision when I arrived at Tchollire that I would no longer be subject to forced labour. So from the very first day I never presented myself for *corvée*. As I explained to the other prisoners, there was an act of collaboration in doing forced labour. This I would not do. I would not collaborate with my oppressors.

It was about a month after the Commissaire had beaten me that the gendarme officer in charge of the guard at the post called me and asked me to do some clearing there. I told him that I was not involved in such works. He observed that he had seen me working in my garden and therefore I was able to work. I again told him I was not involved in *corvée* work. At this he told me I must do what he asked me to do. I refused and to enforce it he subjected me to a beating. This was not as bad as the first but it made everybody in the place fear me. They all believed I had supernatural powers. At this time there were some Muslims of importance there. They had been watching me with much interest and they discovered that I spent most of my time praying and reading the Bible. They had also noticed the influence I wielded over the mad prisoners, for at their wildest moments, I was called for and I often succeeded in calming them. There was not a single prisoner in the place who did not hold me in respect and so I was a peacemaker everywhere.

These Muslims went to the Director and talked to him seriously. They told him that I was a man really devoted to God and that it was unwise for me to be treated the way it had happened these two times.

After this the Director called me again and apologised for what the gendarme had done. He told me he had directed that I should be left alone to attend to my personal gardening. Surely this was the last of it and it would not happen again. This time it did not happen again but I know that the gendarme never acted without his authority. After this I

had all my time to myself and I spent most of it reading the Bible, praying and writing. When my friend Mouhamadou came we spent quite some time together comparing Christianity and Islam, and he taught me quite a lot about Islamic concepts.

Mouhamadou Fokou met me in Tchollire. He had been brought in from Yaounde. I can't remember exactly when he arrived but I think I had been there scarcely six months before he came in. He was then just about forty and I a year older. He spoke pidgin English freely but his command of French was not great. He had fallen from grace with those very tribesmen of his whom he had tried to befriend. His ideas did not seem to fall in line with the real party policy.

Mouhamadou was a native of Maroua who in his early years had received a fairly good Arabic education. He had attended the Koranic school and successfully went through the first three stages of the course leading to the mastership (Mallam). He lived with a certain Modibo who was very pious and had brought him up in the fear of Allah and turned towards heavenly pursuits. This was when he was still less than twenty years old. Once in these years while he was at prayer he had seen a great vision in which the angel Gabriel (Gibril) appeared to him and presented him with a new Bible. It was well bound and had a red cover. The angel came to him and after greeting him told him he, the angel had been sent by Allah to bring him this new Bible the new teaching of the age. He told him to go into the world and proclaim the new message of 'No more war, no more sickness and no more death'.

Mouhamadou shook his head and told the angel that the earth could not accept such a message now. Again how was he, Mouhamadou, to know that he was not a messenger of Satan pretending to be the angel Gabriel? The angel tried to convince him but he was afraid of the message, the more so since it was very improbable that wars and deaths would cease and he did not want to go out into the world as a false

prophet. At the end the angel remarked that he was still very young and promised to come back when Mouhamadou got to the age of twenty-five.

Mouhamadou told me that shortly after this he became somehow involved in politics even though he was still under twenty. His Modibo had taught him that Mohamed had proclaimed that it was Isa (Jesus Christ) who would judge all peoples at the end of the world. Mohamed would present himself before Isa with all those who had believed in his teaching lined up behind him, then Isa would open the gates of heaven and let all of them in. Mouhamadou was therefore surprised to see his fellow Muslims treat as enemies the Christians who had come to the north then as civil servants. He reasoned: 'If these men claim to be for Isa and we shall be judged by Isa, how can we antagonise them? What shall we say to their accusations before Isa on the last day? So Mouhamadou tried to organise a movement calling for peaceful co-existence with Christians declaring that they were also believers and brothers. This was in the 1950s and such ideas were very ill-received by the French colonialists who feared collaboration between the north-erner and southerner. He was arrested and detained, and later bundled off to exile in the South, being first deposited in Fouban. It was thus in Fouban and Bafoussam that he came of age and spent the better part of his youth. Even after Independence the interdiction to move north was still enforced on him and so he later moved and settled in Yaounde. His first return to the north was this visit he now made to Tchollire.

Mouhamadou had later joined UC so as to be allowed to lead a free life but before the formation of the CNU, he had discovered that all its leaders were hypocrites or '*mounaficoun*' as he called them,

He had endeavoured to retrace his steps and keep off quietly but even that had earned him this detention. He had many a time been accused of mixing too much with

southerners. He regretted that before he came to the age of twenty-five he had started drinking alcohol and going after women and so defiled himself that he could not again be visited by a holy one from above. Hence he had had no follow-up on the promise of angel Gabriel to come back when he came to twenty-five.

Mouhamadou admired my devotion to my God, my attachment to the truth and my fearless approach to things. Many a time he warned me that the men of the world (*Dunyia* as he called them) were very wicked and could harm me. In return I told him that they could only harm me if I deviated from the assignments which were given me from above. In my mission here on earth I had no share in lying and hypocrisy. I was come into the world to declare the blunt truth without fear or favour.

We slept in the same cell or room and often prayed together. We passed most of our time after 10 p.m. in praying. We placed our mats side by side and prayed at the same time, he following the Muslim way while I proceeded as the Christians do, though when I think of it, it was more as the spirit directed me.

Because we prayed together, moved together and did most things together, he was accused by the Muslims to the Director of abandoning Islam for Christianity. For this reason my friend was thrown into the disciplinary cell and his Muslim friends with whom he ate would not feed him. Of course I did it and there were no repercussions. What had happened is that Mouhamadou got fed up with the hypocrisy all around and revolted against going to pray at the Director's mosque every Friday. But he still joined the other Muslims in the camp in their daily prayers.

Mouhamadou was a favoured one of God and quickly came back into favour as he started practising. Soon he became a channel through which God spoke to me. There was a revelation Mouhamadou made to me which I may here recount. He told me the voice from on high had told

him to inform me that we (he and myself) were special servants of God and had been sent into this world in this incarnation with a very big assignment. Before us, God had sent into the world the greatest of his prophets ever, with a mission to reconstruct the world. This great prophet was already at work in the world and we should look for him on our release and join in service with him. We were among forty great spirits sent into the world to work with this might prophet. Mouhamadou wanted to know how and where we shall find this great prophet but the voice from above informed him that the prophet had the power to draw us to himself.

Mouhamadou told me many things too about this country. Some have come to pass, some are yet to come. I left Tchollire in 1976 and my friend remained behind. He was released in 1977 and forbidden to come south again. I have been to Garoua once to look for him but I could not find him. I shall search for him again.

Another prisoner with whom I was much connected was the priest Patrice Nuka. He came in early 1975 and bore himself painfully. He looked as though he was soon to pass away from this earth but that meant little to the criminals of the regime. His story was interesting. I shall give only a resume for I am convinced the biography of this priest must be published sooner or later.

By this time he was surely above fifty already and his poor health and the effects of his detention conditions made him look well over sixty. He was one of the early seminarians of Yaounde in the time of Monseigneur Vogt, who seemed to have loved him so much that when the Bishop was on his sick bed, he got the young seminarian to sit and attend to him. The Bishop died in his hands and before dying made a present of his breviary to this young seminarian, Patrice. He told Patrice never to hand it to anybody but that if the Bishops insisted on having it, he must lay it on the ground and tell them that he who lays claim to it may take it.

A wrangle surely ensued over this holy book after the death of the Bishop and when he did what he was told to do he was left with it.

The French civil authority (*Chef de Région*) was even approached to seize the book from him. Patrice again laid it on the ground and said he who laid claim to it could collect it. The Chef de Region was bending down to take it when one of the clergy warned him to keep his hands off.

From this time on young Patrice Nuka had a rough time with the seminarian authorities. Meanwhile he had been having lots of visions and revelations of our Lord Jesus Christ in which Christ revealed to young Patrice that he (the Christ) was coming back to the earth once more, bringing a new civilisation into the world which he would introduce throughout Africa. He had chosen Cameroon as the first place where he would begin this work and Patrice Nuka would be his priest. He told Patrice to inform the Africans that their tears and sufferings under the yoke of the white man had reached heaven. Through the introduction of this civilisation into Africa first God would wipe the tears of this downtrodden people. By it the whole world had to live and since Africa would carry it to the world, they would thus gain mastery of the whites, their present exploiters and oppressors. Our Lord Jesus Christ described the way western civilisation had treated him thus: He, the Christ had given them a civilisation and by it they dominated the world, grew rich and had the best meats of the earth on their tables as well as the best wines. They prepared a sumptuous feast and sat at table leaving Christ in the cold. After eating the best meats and drinking the choicest wines, they rinsed their mouths with water and spat it out at Christ. This was too much and so the Lord was now coming to reverse things and through the black man punish the white. Shortly after these revelations our Lord Jesus Christ came to Patrice in a vision and anointed him a priest.

On the contrary, a short time after that Patrice Nuka was dismissed from the Senior Seminary, two years before his ordination. This was in 1943. He was indeed upset and completely perturbed for he knew our Lord Jesus Christ had already ordained him priest and as such he had no place in the world and its ways and surely could not marry.

He went back to his village, Bafia. The parish priest then was one Lusher, who at first received him well and tried to comfort him. Patrice felt attached to the mission and passed all his time there. The priest advised him to give up the idea of becoming a priest, marry and settle. He even contacted the Chef de Region who was ready to work out his nomination to France as a *conseiller* (counsellor). Patrice refused and was driven away from the mission. Hardship came from all sides and particularly from his own family who felt he should marry, settle and become a good breadwinner for all. He opposed all this and fell out with everybody.

Young girls did their best to tempt him but Christ came to his aid. To cut it short he thus struggled for twenty years until Jean Zoa took over from the French Bishops. In 1963 Jean Zoa sent Patrice to France where he completed his seminary studies and was ordained in Bafia on 15 August 1965. This ended one long drawn out struggle but saw the birth of a new phase of the struggle. That very day, Bafia was carved into a diocese and his former parish priest Lusher was consecrated Bishop of the diocese. Lusher was from a very influential family in France and he had helped Mr Ayissi Mvodo to go to France. Lusher arranged for Ayissi to stay in France with his (Lusher's) family. In the course of time Ayissi fell in love with one of the family daughters and they married. This gave a very powerful situation to Lusher in Cameroon when Ayissi became Minister of Territorial Administration.

When Rev. Patrice Nuka started declaring what had been revealed to him, his Bishop accused him of preaching racism and tried to stop him from practising in his own country. This brought friction between Bishop and priest. The Bishop exploited his colour and position and got the Cameroonian priest arrested and detained. He had already spent about four years there since being arrested. I found in this priest a common calling and we lived in common, eating from the same pot. We often discussed together this proposed coming of Christ to this earth, examining how he would be manifested. Sometimes Mouhamadou was drawn into our discussions.

Shortly after the arrival of this priest, the Commissaire was interview-ing a number of prisoners. I was also called up. It was the Inspector of Police who interviewed me for the Commissaire was away in Garoua. He asked me whether I would agree to serve the Cameroon government when released. I told him that I was committed to serving in Cameroon and had been serving in a government corporation – the West Cameroon Electricity Corporation – when I was arrested. I was ready to serve even in the civil service. No, it was not a civil service appointment that he was talking of, continued the Inspector. Rather he wanted to know what would be my attitude if the President wanted to use me politically. I told him I did not see how that could arise. He told me that the President might consider, for political stability, offering me a political appointment. I told him that if the appointment involved my preaching CNU and Ahidjo, I would have nothing to do with it, that was long decided. He told me then that was the end of my interview and I should have myself to blame. I told him it was all the same to me. One was either physically in chains and mentally free as I was, or physically free and mentally imprisoned like the Ministers and members of Parliament in Yaounde. He retorted that it was but a question of opinion. He was not very happy with my stand but there was little he could do.

Little did I know these were the preparations for the big release of 1975 when Bishop Ndongmo and all who were in with him as well as many detained as fall-outs from the Ouandie rebellion trial, were released. I had lost my chance.

However, something else happened which pleased all of us and me in particular. In the great release of 1975, the Mantoum centre was closed down. It ceased to be a place for detaining political prisoners and was later converted into a common law prison. All the detainees that were there were released but for six Jehovah's Witnesses who had to be transferred to Tchollire. They brought us the good news of how the then Minister of Territorial Administration – Ayissi Mvodo – came in person to carry this out. He lauded the government which had decided to do this act as an illustration of its intentions to democratise; and even said that it was hoped that in the not too distant future a similar ceremony would be carried out in Tchollire which was to remain the only place in the Republic for political detentions. The chaps from Mokolo joined us shortly before those from Mantoum came. This filled us with hope. I felt very happy. It was just over a year since my nine days' hunger strike and the memorable declarations of the *enquête* that just preceded my being sent to Tchollire. Surely, I felt consoled, my action had had a big part to play in bringing these stubborn criminals to this decision.

It is a pity to note that Tchollire is still there to this day.

Chapter Ten

I had given up all hope of ever being released from this prison while Ahidjo was in power. I looked up to God and passed much of my time in prayer and meditation. Many of my friends express wonder at my ability to stay in prayer and meditation for long hours but this is the source. This is how I filled in the hours of my detention. Remember that in Mantoum I even grew to love the days of confinement in solitary cells. The Director thought that the worst punishment he could inflict on me but did not know that I enjoyed those days most. The only thing was that if I finished the number of days I had decided on for the spiritual work then the rest of the days might become wearisome. But it so happened that each time I decided on the number of days, they turned out to be either exact or a day short or over the length the Director decided. So I spent my time then in prayer and meditation waiting for the day of the Lord. And it came when I least expected it. My hostility to the regime was known by all and so neither Commissaire nor Director ever came near me talking of the regime for fear of receiving those words that pained their ears. I think sometimes those words caused them to think again.

In May or June 1976, a group of five or six people were brought from Ngaoundere. Important Muslims they were and big businessmen too. I remember one of them was the husband of the President of the WCNU (Women of the Cameroon National Union). The story went that they had carried out a certain Islamic rite against Saoudou Daouda and Ahmadou Ahidjo. They had slaughtered a horse, or maybe a cow, and buried it thereby calling on the angels of

death to visit these two. The people themselves never accepted the accusation. But the story circulated in the prison that, but for the vigilance of the security network, the buried horse would have gone rotten and nothing could have saved the two great lords.

This story shook the faith of the people in the regime. If even Muslims could resort to these extremes what did they expect of the men from the South?

And this man whose wife was the WCNU President, he was a personal friend to Ahidjo and the Head of State always visited him at home each time he came to Ngaoundere. Who then was a sincere lover of this Ahidjo? And so they started seeing some reason in what I had been saying. I had told them that there were only two members of the CNU I knew of who truly belonged to the CNU. Every other person was a fortune seeker and did not even like the party. The Commissaire became more friendly with me and often came to discuss with me, putting questions to me on the pre-independence struggle, the parties and their leaders and policies. I was not reserved for it mattered less to me for what objectives he was seeking the information. It was good to bring these facts to as many Cameroonians as possible.

It was about this time, too, that another prisoner arrived at the camp. I think it was already in August 1976 when this one came. I can't remember his name but he was a big shot from Yaounde. He was a *Commissaire Divisionel Principal* of Police, either the Director of Police Judiciaire or Deputy Director of *Renseignements Généraux* (General Information). And you know these are the real overlords in this country. He could not understand what was happening to him and those around, too, looked embarrassed at his coming. Who then was secure in the regime?

I remember shortly after he had arrived he once came to me desirous of hearing my story. He thought he would not be there long and when he got back to Yaounde he could throw a better light on my case. I laughed at him and told him

that he did not understand the logistics of his own regime. I assured him it would be easier for me to be released than for him. All the same I told him my story was the story of Cameroon and it was good all sons and daughters of Cameroon should know the truth about their nation instead of the fabrications that were now made around the person of Ahmadou Ahidjo. I took pains to expose to him as much as possible the story as best I could. Before I left he was already getting worried for I think he had already done nearly two months there. When they gave orders and people were detained for long periods they did not notice the harm they did. They had power and used it without thinking of the consequences.

I left him back at Tchollire and those who came in 1977 told me he had almost gone crazy. I wonder what happened to him later.

It was about 9 a.m. that 6 October 1976 when a car drove into our camp and someone important looking came out of it in the company of the Director of the centre, immediately followed by the Commissaire.

The bell was rung to summon us to the assembly point in the centre of the camp. We had given up hopes of any possible release, because 20 May had come and gone, and 1 September had come and gone. (We had been very optimistic about that date since it was the tenth anniversary of the CNU.) After 15 September we believed we had been forgotten. Now we were proved wrong. As the prisoners hurried to the place I did not even feel concerned; after all it was a painful goodbye I would bid those going away. I could not be considered by Ahidjo and his bunch for release. So I continued to crack my groundnuts under the tree near our house. Some urged me to move at least to avoid the anger of the authorities. Soon the Inspector of Police called from afar asking me whether I had now fallen in love with Tchollire and would not like to leave it. I laughed and told him release was not for my type anyway but I would come

and bid farewell to the lucky ones going home. I came up and without unnecessary formalities we were told that the President had decided to extend his grace to us as a measure of appreciation for the way in which the nation had carried out the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the party. And then the names were read. I could not believe my ears when my name was read. But I had to believe my eyes as a copy of the *arrêté* was handed to me. I remember it was signed on 22 September 1976. Yes, it was indeed an afterthought.

God is wonderful and so even within this hostile regime he could lead me out of this prison. My mother had died in May and this hurt me badly. One of my greatest desires had been to give her a fitting burial. I was happy to go early to her grave and there shed my tears of love, not because she died but because she did not get the type of burial I thought good for her.

That evening we slept at Garoua and the next morning we were taken by bus to Ngaoundere where we took a train for Yaounde. At this point too our gendarme escorts abandoned us. In Yaounde, we had to go to the Prefecture, where arrangements were made for our travel. In Yaounde I had a train ticket for Douala and transport requisition papers to travel to Bamenda. These were useless as no transporter accepted them. But I had come back into circulation and so friends took charge of the rest.

Yet as experience has since shown, I had only been partially released for security men reported on those friends who came close to me. As a consequence I have lived ever since almost ostracised in society, not because the people hate me but because it is dangerous to be too close to me. With this resettlement has been almost impossible and today, more than seven years after my release, I still live under very difficult conditions which, but for my early formation and spiritual development, could have hastened my exit from this world. Of course one of their greatest hopes has been to see me run wild and naked in the streets. God forbid!!!

Doughty human rights crusader, Albert Mukong was incarcerated for six years in some of Cameroon's worst detention centres under the despotic regime of late President Amadou Ahidjo. This book details his personal account of the discipline and punishment that the Cameroonian state has systematically dished out to dissidents who have dared to stand their ground. Until his death in 2004, Albert Mukong was without doubt, Anglophone Cameroon's most conspicuous political prisoner, spokesperson and champion human rights advocate. The particular detention he recounts in this book is evidence of how nationalists such as Ruben Um Nyobe, Ernest Ouandie, Bishop Ndongmo and others, have in their struggles sacrificed enormously so that freedom and democracy might see the light of day in their reluctant Cameroon.

Albert Mukong was born in Babanki Tungo in 1933 and attended St. Joseph's College Sasse, Buea. Apart from being a direct election opponent in the 1950s and 1960s of the late John Ngu Foncha – former Prime Minister and Vice-President of Cameroon –, Mukong participated in talks leading to Cameroon's independence at the United Nations in New York. As Secretary General of the One Kamerun party led by Nde Ntumanzah, Mukong was in direct alliance with the Francophone Cameroon's UPC of Un Nyobe and Ouandie – President Ahidjo's main opposition. He may have died of indignity, but he never relented seeking human dignity for all and sundry.



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